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FROM: EDWIN POOTS MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

DATE: 2 November 2020

TO: CONOR MURPHY MLA
Minister of Finance

DRAFT EXECUTIVE PAPER - 2020-21 OCTOBER MONITORING ROUND AND COVID FUNDING POSITION

Thank you for sight of your 27 October paper on these exercises.

In respect of the £202.5 million available for allocation by the Executive I believe that it would be prudent to hold this funding back until we have greater certainty on the effectiveness of the current restrictions and the potential for alternative strategies.

I note that based on the proposed allocations, that approximately £100 million would be held in reserve. However, I believe that the full £202.5 million available to the Executive should be held back until we have greater certainty on the effectiveness of the actions the Executive has taken to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. We need to ensure that we can react to the challenges that may occur in the latter half of the current financial year as there is no guarantee that further funding will be available from Treasury.

I believe there is a need to prioritise spend in order to avoid the need for further lockdowns and the allocation of this support funding should reflect this.

In respect of my own Department a key priority remains in keeping the food chain secure. We therefore have to be aware of the potential impact COVID-19 can have on primary producers affected by the closure of meat plants or sudden shocks in market prices.

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I am very disappointed that my £1.0m Common Market Organisation Resource DEL bid is not being met. EU funding in this area finishes on 15 October 2020 at the end of our last EU financial year and the bid covers the rest of our own financial year to 31 March 2021.

Not meeting this bid represents the first example of funding that will no longer be provided by the EU following our exit which will not be replaced by Treasury or the Executive. This sets an unwelcome precedent for the agri-food sector. It also reduces that sector's competitiveness with the Republic of Ireland and minimises the opportunities that will arise as a result of the United Kingdom leaving the EU.

I am content to note and agree the other recommendations, but as I have mentioned above I do not agree that only £100 million be held to provide support for any further restrictions and the corresponding COVID-19 allocations that reduce the £202.5 million allocation to this level.

This memo has been copied to Ministerial Colleagues, the Attorney General, the Office of the First Legislative Counsel and the Executive Secretariat.

Personal Data

EDWIN POOTS MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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