



Northern Ireland
Executive

The Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn

Preface

In December 2008 the Executive announced its first consolidated package of measures to address the local impacts of the economic downturn. That package was compiled through discussion with an extensive range of stakeholders from the business, trade unions, financial, consumer and voluntary and community sectors.

To maintain our dialogue with this wide range of interest groups we established the Cross Sector Advisory Forum (CSAF) to consider and advise on how we might best deal with the worst impacts of the economic crisis on local people and businesses.

The Forum met four times and formed sub-groups to take forward the various strands of work.

The CSAF sub-groups were chaired by Ministers and they covered:

- (i) **Infrastructure, Planning and Procurement (IPP):** Jointly Chaired by the Ministers of the Environment and Regional Development.
- (ii) **Business and Skills (B&S):** Jointly Chaired by the Ministers for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and Employment and Learning.
- (iii) **Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy (HPDE):** Jointly Chaired by the Junior Ministers of OFMDFM.
- (iv) **Agriculture (AGRI):** Chaired by the Minister for Agriculture
- (v) **Banking, Finance and Lending (BFL):** Chaired by the Minister for Finance and Personnel.
- (vi) **Housing and Property (H&P):** Chaired by the Minister for Social Development.

This culminated in the production of specific recommendations for priority actions and can be summarised as follows:

Infrastructure, Planning and Procurement

Measures to address infrastructure, planning and procurement propose the use of public sector capital spending to support the local construction and other business sectors; use public procurement to stimulate the economy and assist in the delivery of the most economically advantageous outcomes, including specific measures to deliver PfG commitments and the full consideration of social procurement guidelines; and use planning to assist local business.

These measures include: promoting good practice for planning applications; promoting improved small business access to public procurement; developing local government's role in relation to local economic development; improving the ISNI Delivery Tracking System; faster planning decisions in housing extensions; two major capital builds for jobs and benefits offices; health estates expenditure; and taking timely decisions on the regeneration at the Crumlin Road Gaol, Glen 10 Site, Ebrington and Maze / Long Kesh.

Business and Skills

Measures to address business and skills aim to support business, people and the local economy; enable the unemployed to get back into work; harness and support local innovation; develop the opportunities available from local tourism; and support local job creation and retention.

These measures include: support for the social economy; promoting take up of export schemes; increasing awareness of existing business support; encouraging world class capability in sales and marketing; promoting collaborative working opportunities between foreign companies and local manufacturers; developing and implementing the New Tourism Strategy (in conjunction with measures to encourage economic activity in town and city centres and contribute to inward investment); identifying and exploiting opportunities in renewable / energy efficiency sector; consider Green New Deal proposals; identifying and implementing short term schemes to retain employment levels; to introduce skillsafe schemes to upskill and ensure apprentices are able to complete their training; steps to work programmes; pilot internships for graduates; management and leadership development programmes; rural childcare programmes; a new R&D scheme; and implementation of MATRIX.

Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy,

Measures to address hardship, poverty, debt and energy aim to help relieve the social and welfare hardships arising from the economic crisis;

help combat illegal money lending and help local people in the management of debt.

These measures include: further work to investigate illegal money lending; providing off site facilities to help facilitate applications for benefits; extending the roll-out of the FSA Money Guidance locally; social security agency web-based benefits adviser services; provision of on-site redundancy services; promoting awareness of Green New Deal energy efficiency measures; providing a central point of information on sources of support to address poverty; continuing to promote benefit entitlement; removing the cap on the number of prepayment gas meters; accelerating work investigating improving switching systems for energy customers moving from one supplier to another; encouraging banks to address financial exclusion of younger people; promoting Lord Chief Justice pre-action protocol on re-possession proceedings; new powers allowing registered social housing landlords to broker energy at a discounted tariff; continue implementing a programme of insulation of homes (Warm Homes Scheme); and aligning local Credit Union functions with GB and ROI.

Agriculture

Measures to address agriculture aim to help support the local farming industry through the current crisis; and provide opportunities for renewables and the Green New Deal.

These measures include: promoting the support available to develop renewable energy; farm modernisation; streamlining planning applications for micro businesses; simplifying the planning applications and approvals process for modest scale projects; fast track approval for EU compliance for on-farm agricultural developments; encouraging greater support from banks for micro agricultural business; ensuring integration of renewable energy technology into new buildings design; considering feasibility of financial incentives for promotion of renewable energy (feed-in tariff/renewable heat incentive).

Banking, Finance and Lending

Measures to address banking, finance and lending aim to secure a sufficient flow of credit to support local business and people.

These measures include: banking surveys to measure the extent of lending; ensuring easy access to Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme; ensuring access to Short Term Aid Scheme; providing information on bank charges; local banks to respond to HM Treasury

consultation on government lending guarantee schemes; and encouraging local banks to consider working with the Ulster Community Investment Trust to support the social economy sector.

Housing and Property

Measures to address housing and property focus on the current challenges in the local housing and property market, including help to prevent repossessions; help the growing numbers in need of social housing; help first time buyers; keep supply on track; and help to support the construction industry.

These measures include: developing new mortgage products for first time buyers; housing associations to look for new funding opportunities outside government; and providing information on areas where there is unmet social housing need.

In parallel with the work of CSAF, the Economic Development Forum (EDF) also brought forward recommendations on how best to address the economic crisis.

This paper brings together the work of both Fora and associated recommendations generated by departments to produce a consolidated statement of measures to address the downturn.

This package sets out those things we are doing immediately as well as things we will keep under review to pursue actively as plans mature and resources become available and as we continue to monitor the impact of prevailing economic conditions.

To have faced a major economic crisis that is unparalleled in generations so early in the life of the Executive has been challenging. Nevertheless, the ability of the Executive and Assembly to prioritise the interests of local people and businesses has produced a significant benefit. The Executive will continue to monitor and address these issues and ensure that we do all that we can to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis on local people and businesses.

ACTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION¹

A. INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND PROCUREMENT

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Planning service to encourage greater take up of the Pre Application Discussions (PADs) process (Planning Service, Department of the Environment (DOE));
- Embed the new Good Practice Guide for major housing applications across the Planning Service (Planning Service, DOE / Construction Employers Federation (CEF));
- Continue to work with councils to further develop their procurement methods and encourage councils to more effectively engage with local SMEs (Local Government Division, DOE);
- Continue to work with local government as part of the local government reform programme to further develop local government's role in relation to local economic development (Local Government Division, DOE / Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI));
- Consider how additional relevant detail can be provided through the ISNI Information Portal in respect of potential expenditure on infrastructure and advanced warning of contract letting (Strategic Investment Board (SIB), Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM));
- Issue PPS5 on Retail Development as soon as practicable (Planning and Environmental Policy Group, DOE);
- Continue to work with the Centres of Procurement Expertise and the Construction Industry Group for NI to ensure that work to address the issues identified by the Construction Industry Forum for NI Procurement Task Group Report is completed by December 2009 (Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)); and
- Consider the Report commissioned by the Federation of Small Businesses and assess the extent to which the issues raised have already been addressed through Government procurement initiatives aimed at increasing SME access to public procurement opportunities or whether further action is necessary (CPD, DFP).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Stimulate the construction sector by accelerating capital spending and also including implementing the ISNI Delivery Tracking System (SIB / DFP / other NI Departments);
- Continue to seek faster decisions through planning reform process (DOE);
- Increase spending on maintenance of health estates (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS));
- Take timely decisions on regeneration at Crumlin Road Gaol (Department for Social Development (DSD));

¹ Lead department(s) of recommendation in brackets.

- Take timely decisions on regeneration at Glen 10 site (DSD);
- Take timely decisions on regeneration Ebrington (OFMDFM); and
- Take timely decisions on regeneration at Maze / Long Kesh (OFMDFM).

OTHER MEASURES

- Develop the infrastructure pilot scheme through the Modernisation Fund(DSD);
- Introduce a Communities facilities improvement scheme through the Modernisation fund(DSD);
- Provide a small capital grants scheme for investment to improve service from charitable bodies, community or voluntary organisations and social economy enterprises (DSD); and
- Use the Jobs and Benefits project to deliver two major capital builds [Ballymena Jobs and Benefits office opened March 2010] (DSD).

B.BUSINESS AND SKILLS

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Extend the eligibility of Government programmes / schemes for Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs) and Voluntary sector organisations (DETI / Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) / DSD);
- Consider feasibility of expanding the natural gas network in NI through research/feasibility study (DETI / Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) / Energy Companies); and
- Provide easier access to the public procurement process for Small and Medium sized businesses and Social Economy Enterprises (CPD, DFP / DETI).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Increase awareness of existing export schemes (Invest NI);
- Work with stakeholders and partners to develop a continuum of support that builds on the NI export brand concept (Invest NI);
- Improve effective signposting through engagement of stakeholders and briefing on the full range of export support available (Invest NI);
- Build on the existing relationships between Invest NI client advisers and the trade services team (Invest NI / DETI);
- Provide support for exporters and continue to develop case studies with the use of video and other digital medial formats (Invest NI);
- Better publicise the Invest NI Export Skills and Knowledge workshops and other export support programmes (Invest NI);
- Provide in house resource to help deal with small company export issues (Invest NI);
- Staff from Business Information Centre to continue to support Invest NI road shows (Invest NI);
- Invest NI to proactively determine the sales opportunity within markets (Invest NI);
- Consultation on the recommendations of the Independent Review of Economic Policy (DETI);

- Minimise bureaucracy/delay through a rationalised approach for supporting R&D business improvements (Invest NI);
- Support renewable energy research to promote the uptake of suitable technologies in the agricultural sector to help reduce carbon footprint (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD));
- Increase awareness of existing Invest NI and DEL schemes (Invest NI / DEL);
- Encourage world class capability in sales and marketing through the funding of high performance training and development (DEL / Invest NI);
- Use Invest NI international network and Trade Missions to further identify licensing and collaborative working opportunities between foreign companies and local manufacturers (DETI / Invest NI);
- Develop and implement the New Tourism Strategy (DETI / NITB / Tourism Ireland) in conjunction with measures to encourage economic activity in town and city centres and contribute to inward investment (DSD);
- Identify and exploit opportunities in the renewables / energy efficiency sector (taking account of Green New Deal) – consider establishment of Biomass Capital Grant Challenge Fund (DETI / DARD / Invest NI / Centre for Competiveness);
- Identify and implement short term schemes to retain employment levels – Short Term Assistance Scheme up and running (Invest NI);
- Introduction of Skillsafe schemes to upskill and ensure apprentices able to complete training (DEL);
- Continue implementation of MATRIX report: establish phase 2 MARIX panel, launch pilot Industry Innovation Communities (DETI);
- Encourage land based rural businesses to engage in collaborative R&D activities through proposed launch of Industry Research Challenge Fund (DARD);
- Review by DEL of its entire marketing strategy and campaign aimed at those affected by economic downturn (DEL);
- Introduce under the Skillsafe scheme, sales and marketing training (DEL / Invest NI);
- Exploit current opportunities from tourism arising from £/€ exchange rate through additional tourism marketing (DETI / NITB / Tourism Ireland);
- Provide graduate opportunities for those qualifying during 2009/10 and 2010/11 through the Graduate Acceleration programme through job placement lasting 26 weeks (DEL);
- Introduce programme-led apprenticeships for those apprentices who cannot find employment at present (DEL);
- Introduce a pilot graduate internship scheme (6 months paid employment with a training element with the community and voluntary sector) (DEL);
- To provide funding for management development training for small companies and Management and Leadership Masterclass – actioned under Made not Born Campaign (DEL);
- InterDepartmental Working Group on Sustainable Energy to consider Green New Deal proposals [proposal now complete] (DETI); and
- Identify and exploit opportunities in the renewables / energy efficiency sector (taking account of Green New Deal) – to be considered by

InterDepartmental Working Group on Sustainable Energy [proposal now complete] (DETI).

OTHER MEASURES

- Launch a range of measures to ensure continued delivery of Employment Services to increasing number of clients (DEL);
- Introduce programme-led apprenticeship training provision for unemployed 16 and 17 year olds (DEL);
- Provide focused careers guidance services to meet the needs of unemployed professionals (DEL);
- Continue with the Steps to Work programme (DEL);
- Provide work placements with the public sector for programme led apprenticeships (DEL);
- Enhance Management and Leadership development programmes (DEL);
- Introduce contingency arrangements for apprentices who have been made redundant to continue training (DEL);
- Support rural childcare programme (DARD);
- Support Higher Education capital investment (DEL); and
- Launch pilot internship to test Future Jobs Fund 18-24 Young person guarantee; pilot Future Jobs Fund model for 18-24 year olds (50 temporary jobs for six months with training element) (DEL).

C. HARDSHIP, POVERTY, DEBT AND ENERGY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Host a roundtable event on illegal money lending undertaken (Economic Policy Unit (EPU), OFMDFM);
- Provide facilities to commence the application process for benefits off-site from the Social Security Agency e.g. at MLA office, Citizens Advice Bureau independent and specialist advice agencies etc (Social Security Agency (SSA), DSD / Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS);
- Support the ongoing efforts by the Executive and others to extend the roll-out of the FSA Money Guidance locally (OFMDFM);
- Promote awareness of Green New Deal environmental measures (EPU / Executive Information Services (EIS), OFMDFM);
- Secure agreement for the implementation of the NI section of the FSA and Treasury Financial Capability Report (Equality Unit, OFMDFM);
- Address poverty in its widest sense – provide a central point of information to enable joined up of delivery (EIS / NI Departments);
- Accurately measure the extent of illegal money lending and legal doorstep money lending (where extortionate rates are charged) (EPU, OFMDFM / VCS / DETI);
- Research existing alternatives to illegal money lending and legal doorstep lending (EPU, OFMDFM / DETI);
- Develop an alternative funding source to illegal money lending (with need to involve the banks etc) e.g. like the St. Vincent de Paul and Cork Credit Union initiative (EPU, OFMDFM / DETI);

- Promote awareness of benefit entitlement eg through outreach, promotional events, publications, and the Benefit Uptake Programme (DSD);
- Decision on removal the existing cap on the number of prepayment gas meters (NIAUR / DETI);
- Investigate the scope for improvements to the electricity and gas switching systems, through the Utility Regulator work on market opening in NI including greater Belfast (DETI / NIAUR);
- Encourage the banks to address financial exclusion of younger people (DFP);
- Active promotion of the Lord Chief Justice Pre-Action Protocol on Re-Possession Proceedings (i.e. recommended good practice for lenders when repossessing properties/homes) (DFP);
- New powers allowing registered social housing landlords to broker energy at a discounted tariff (NIHE / Credit Unions / DSD);
- Implement a programme of insulation of homes (Warm Home Scheme) (DSD / DEL); and
- Aligning local Credit unions functions with GB and ROI (DETI).

OTHER MEASURES

- Further implementation of benefit uptake programme [2009/10 Benefit Uptake campaign has ended] (DSD);
- Introduce Social Security Agency web-based benefits adviser service (DSD);
- Provide on site redundancy service provided at workplace (DEL (with SSA, Invest NI, ESGA careers etc);
- Tackle local exclusion and poverty issues in rural areas. (Provide grants up to £5k to community and voluntary groups) (DARD);
- Continue Warm Homes Scheme (DARD);
- Roll out the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (DARD); and
- Maximise access to benefits, grants and service to deprived rural wards (through interdepartmental agency collaboration) (DARD).

D. AGRICULTURE

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Publicise and promote the diverse range of help and support mechanisms that is on offer relating to the stimulation of the renewable energy market (DETI);
- Be proactive in publicising and explaining the requirements, processes, costs and timescales involved in planning applications for diversification and micro-business projects done through provision of information and advice (DOE);
- To ensure planning is sympathetic to diversification and micro-business proposals by ensuring that applications are dealt with quickly, efficiently and consistently in order to capitalise on the economic opportunities afforded by diversification and small business creation (Planning Service, DOE);

- To assist this, every effort must be made to simplify the planning application process for these modest scale projects (Planning Service, DOE).
- Where on-farm developments are required to ensure compliance with EU legislation (e.g. the forthcoming investments necessary to meet laying hen welfare requirements), a fast track approvals mechanism should be developed to facilitate this process (Planning Service, DOE);
- Encourage the banking sector in their role in nurturing and growing diversification and micro-business enterprises (DARD / Banks);
- As a matter of urgency, look again at the use of Building Regulations as a means of stimulating the demand for renewable energy technologies, ensuring these are appropriately integrated into the design and construction of suitable new properties and major refurbishments (DFP); and
- Consider feasibility of Renewable Heat Incentives to stimulate the development of the local renewable energy market (DETI).

OTHER MEASURES

- Continue with farm modernisation programme (DARD); and
- Prioritise the 2010 payment plan to pay money due to farmers as quickly as possible (DARD).

E.BANKING, FINANCE AND LENDING

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Carry out another banking survey to ascertain recent developments with respect to bank lending in the local economy (Institute of Directors (IoD), DFP);
- Local banks to encourage their customers to take part in the Institute of Directors lending survey (Local Banks, IoD, DFP);
- Local banks to highlight to HM Treasury, through the British Banking Association any issues encountered with the current Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme to inform the replacement scheme - due to be introduced in April 2010 (Local Banks, British Banking Association (BBA), DFP);
- Further information on local bank charges to be sought from the British Banking Association and to be published (DFP, IoD, BBA); and
- Local banks to consider working with the Ulster Community Investment Trust to support the social economy sector (Local Banks, Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT)).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Ensure easy access to Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme, and encourage the banks to use this to provide short term liquidity to SMEs (DETI / Invest NI);
- Ensure easy access to Short Term Aid Scheme (DETI / Invest NI); and
- Monitor availability and ease of access to bank finance (DETI / OFMdFM).

F. HOUSING AND PROPERTY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Encourage the banks to continue to develop mortgage products that will help to attract first time buyers into the market (DSD / Banks); and
- Introduce and regularly update an online database displaying locations with unmet social housing need by District Council area and settlement (Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) / DSD).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Stimulate the housing market – DSD spending on social housing (DSD); and
- With government's support, housing associations need to look for new funding opportunities outside government (DSD).

ACTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

FOR SHORT / MEDIUM TERM CONSIDERATION

A. INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND PROCUREMENT

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Provide construction industry with breakdown of current contracts and clear notice of future contract opportunities – including:
 - Provision of additional information on the Web Portal (DRD);
 - Railway platform extensions at rail stations, and construction of a train maintenance facility at Adelaide (DRD);
 - Complete a major relay of the track between Coleraine and Derry (DRD);
 - Continue to upgrade and improve the Bus Fleet available to Translink (DRD);

B. BUSINESS AND SKILLS

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Fund the conversion of public buildings to gas (considered on case by case basis) (DFP).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Provide support to potential exporters including:
 - Develop export support for potential exporters to focus on developing export capability (most is currently focussed on existing export ready companies) (Invest NI);
 - Develop market support models geared to the complexities of the markets (Invest NI);
 - Introduce more programmes similar to the successful 'Going Dutch' programme (Invest NI);
- Consider how business can access Invest NI library on line (Invest NI);
- Exploit tourism by improving bus / rail links to local airports (DRD);
- Provide support to graduates and management including:
 - Invest NI to pilot with University of Ulster a German Student Programme with five local companies (Invest NI); and
 - Consider the creation of a NI Management and Leadership Masterclass (DETI / Invest NI).

C.HARDSHIP, POVERTY, DEBT AND ENERGY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Extend current programmes to address attitudinal barriers to applying for benefits by raising delivery of benefit uptake activities (DSD);
- Raise targets for social consideration/impacts in procurement projects (DFP); and
- Fund a media campaign and other forms of education on illegal money lending (OFMDFM / DETI).

D. AGRICULTURE

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Showcase the local food offering including speciality and artisan foods and beverages to promote tourism (DETI).

OTHER MEASURES

- Introduce new financial assistance scheme for young farmers to be developed with the local banks (DARD).

E. HOUSING AND PROPERTY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Lease more private sector housing for social rented housing (DSD);
- Explore further new shared ownership and shared equity schemes (DSD); and
- Review of the social housing waiting list to target resources where needed (DSD).

F. BANKING, FINANCE AND LENDING

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Investigation of feasibility of a financial mediation scheme for business to promote sources of finance (DFP / DETI).

FOR LONGER TERM CONSIDERATION

A. INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND PROCUREMENT

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Accelerate planned education infrastructure spend for projects in the coming years (DE);
- Provide construction industry with breakdown of current contracts and clear notice of future contract opportunities on:
 - Develop waste infrastructure (to reduce landfill e.g. through enhanced recycling) to protect the environment (DOE);
 - Increase spending on maintenance of schools (DE);
 - Increase spending on road structural maintenance (DRD);
 - Take timely decisions on regeneration at Fort George / Andersonstown Gateway (DSD / ILEX);
 - Take timely decisions on regeneration at Glengall Transport Hub (DRD); and
 - Take timely decisions on regeneration at Lisanelly – for use as an education campus (DE).

B. BUSINESS AND SKILLS

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Using EU Structural Funds to finance Green New Deal Housing proposals (DFP / DSD);
- Using the rates system to incentivise business/domestic customers to invest in energy efficiency (DFP / DETI); and
- Development of a smart grid and roll out of installation of smart meters (DETI / Invest NI / Centre for Competitiveness / NIAUR).

C. HARDSHIP, POVERTY, DEBT AND ENERGY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Addressing fuel poverty more intensely and in particular for older people through greater funding for fuel poverty measures (DSD);
- Accelerate gas connections to public buildings, businesses, and social housing in the new gas towns along the existing North West and South/North pipelines (DETI);
- Implement locally as appropriate the GB BERR White Paper “A Better Deal for Consumers” (DETI); and
- Move Lifetime Opportunities (the Anti-Poverty Strategy) to a statutory basis (Equality Division, OFMDFM).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Identify and implement measures to provide short and longer term relief on cost pressures, e.g. electricity prices (lowering the Public Service Obligation Levy) (DETI).

D. AGRICULTURE

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Use public procurement on new build and refurbishment to promote sustainable supply chains and to use district heating systems for new social housing build (DFP / DSD); and
- Developing a more strategic, integrated and coherent approach to the Food and Drink sector (DETI / DARD).

E. HOUSING AND PROPERTY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Increasing funding for social housing (DSD).

ACTIONS NOT FEASIBLE AT PRESENT

A. INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND PROCUREMENT

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Continue to seek faster decisions through planning reform process – further shorten decision making of key projects from 6 months to 3 months (DOE).

B. BUSINESS AND SKILLS

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Consider creating a Housing Energy Efficiency Fund to improve the efficiency of the housing stock locally at a potential cost of £75m per annum for 10 years (DFP); and
- Investigate the viability of introducing a Northern Ireland Green Energy Bond outside the NI public expenditure framework to finance the Green New Deal housing proposal (DFP / NIAUR / Business Alliance).

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Continue with Exporting Excellence initiative (E2) (Invest NI);
- Grant manufacturers a “rates holiday” for a minimum of one year (DFP);
- Fund placement of graduates with manufacturing employers for one year (has associated job displacement issues) (DEL / Invest NI); and
- Pilot ICT scheme for graduate placement (associated job displacement issues) (DEL).

C. HARDSHIP, POVERTY, DEBT AND ENERGY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Promote awareness of good sources of low cost debt management services (DETI);
- Make changes to legislation to allow more effective sharing of personal data relevant to benefit application (DSD);
- Provide a lower cost for the conversion from oil to natural gas (DETI);
- Introduce a cap on interest rates used by legal lenders (Her Majesty Treasury (HMT) / Office of Fair Trading (OFT));
- To put in place protection for private tenants when landlord’s property is repossessed (DSD / DFP provided advice); and
- Investigate the potential for financial support for domestic alternative energy efficient sources e.g. solar/wind power to promote greater energy consumer choice [not being done – Reconnect evaluation did not show VFM] (DETI / DSD).

D. BANKING, FINANCE AND LENDING

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

- Support an advertising campaign to raise awareness of the EFGS in NI (DETI / Invest NI).

E. HOUSING AND PROPERTY

MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE CROSS SECTOR ADVISORY FORUM

- Local borrowers and tenants should be entitled to legal aid to assist with the legal costs of mortgage possession proceedings at court where the debt is undisputed (DFP).