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Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS WRITTEN (AQW)

Due for answer on: Wednesday 24 February 2016

AQW No: 54033/11-16

Put Down By: Ms J Dobson

Political Party: UUP

Constituency: Upper Bann

Question:

To ask the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what consultation has been taken on the closure of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme with the (a) industry; and (b) agri-food strategy board, given the impact on the 'Going for Growth' strategy; (ii) for his assessment of the impact on the local economy and the future growth within the Northern Ireland poultry sector; and (iii) how he will respond to the reaction of the poultry industry.

Answer:

As I set out in the plenary debate on The Renewable Heat Incentive Schemes (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016, keeping the RHI open to new applications would place additional pressure on the Executive's budget from 2016/17. This left no choice but to move to suspend the scheme as soon as practicable as I had warned the Assembly on 17 November 2015 would be the case if Treasury funding was restricted.

I note there are no specific recommendations on renewable heat under the 'Going for Growth' monitoring update. However, the Gas to the West project which is referenced is proceeding with input of up to £30 million from my department.

The suspension of the scheme will not lead to a loss of government investment in the local economy as existing installations will continue to be supported for up to twenty years and this will bring around an additional £130 million investment into NI over the next five years to add to the £50 million already supplied under the schemes. However, in contrast to previous years, local funding will have to contribute to paying for the RHI over the next five years.

Closure of the RHI means that support will not be available for those who had hoped to apply for it in the future. However, keeping open the scheme would consume more of the Executive's resources and could lead to adverse impacts in other sectors.

As I said in the Assembly, I have responded to concerns about the immediate closure of the RHI by extending the deadline for closure to 29 February 2016.

Jonathan Bell MLA
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Date: _____