
From: Edgar, Leona
Sent: 09 February 2016 17:15
To: Timothy Johnston; Johnston, Timothy; Richard Bullick; Bullick, Richard; Stephen Brimstone; Brimstone, Stephen; johnrobinson@dup.org.uk
Cc: Gardner, Jeremy; Wallwin, Judith
Subject: FW: PA RELEASE - OFMDFM - ECONOMY MINISTER URGES PROBE AFTER EARLY CLOSURE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEME

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-----Original Message-----

From: EIS News OFMDFM
Sent: 09 February 2016 16:48
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ECONOMY MINISTER URGES PROBE AFTER EARLY CLOSURE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEME

PA
ULSTER Energy
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By David Young, Press Association

Page 1

Stormont's economy minister has asked officials to investigate whether an ill-fated incentive scheme to encourage renewable energy use was run properly.

Jonathan Bell unexpectedly closed the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme late last week, citing budgetary pressures.

He said a cut in central government funding for renewable energy provision and a huge spike in demand for the scheme late last year prompted the move to shut it down ahead of schedule.

Mr Bell told the Assembly on Tuesday that if he had not acted the Executive could have faced an overspend bill totalling GBP27 million.

He added: "Inevitably there will be an investigation into why we have found ourselves in this position and I have urgently asked my own officials to ensure the scheme is running to the letter and also to the spirit of the law.

"And I will be keeping a very, very close eye on that."

Businesses working in the renewable energy sector have expressed alarm at the move, claiming hundreds of jobs could be at risk.

The RHI provided support to businesses and homeowners keen to switch to eco-friendly heating sources.

It was launched to the non-domestic sector in 2012 and extended to the domestic sector two years later.

During Assembly question time, a number of MLAs challenged Mr Bell on the timing and rationale behind his announcement.

He responded: "There has been a huge increase in the demand for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme from the end of last year and that does not just give my department, but Northern Ireland, a huge budgetary pressure, because the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to limit the amount of money that was paid to Northern Ireland out of the UK pot for renewable heat and that's why I signalled my intention last week to ease that financial pressure, which could amount to over GBP27 million."

The minister said he would try to help those businesses impacted by the closure.

"I have been listening to individuals who are currently installing the renewable heat boilers and I think it's important that everyone in this House, and all of us as politicians, listen and do all that we can to help as many people as possible and I'll reflect on what is being said to me," he said.

"I'll examine ways in which I can help those who have been affected by my decision last week."

Green party leader Steven Agnew claimed the scheme had not been managed properly.

"This latest bout of incompetence and lack of prudent financial management will likely cost up to 1,000 jobs," he warned.

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