



“Budget Scenarios Now an Issue of Public Safety”

The Quarry Products Association NI who represent the majority of construction material suppliers in Northern Ireland, employing over 5000 people, is calling on all political leaders to take action to alleviate the acute challenges facing Departmental Budgets as a matter of public safety.

Gordon Best, Regional Director QPANI, said “The scenarios being presented by the Departments, particularly the Department of Infrastructure present a real threat to public safety and our economy”

The recently published Budget Outlook 2018-2020 by the Finance Department outlines the challenges for all Government Departments in the face of cuts to the NI Resource Budget which will significantly affect the day to day operation of Departments and delivery of services they provide. In real terms the day to day operational budget for Departments will be cut by 0.9% next year and a further 2.3% in 2019/20. It is now abundantly clear that the NI Budget pressures are so acute that difficult political decisions need to be taking in the areas of revenue raising, revue of policies and Departmental reductions.

In reply to these reductions the Department of Infrastructure have indicated they will have to impose significant cutbacks on services and programmes. The DoI set out three possible scenarios they face in making reductions to programmes and activities to ensure they live within the Budget imposed on them. Scenario 2 is the most favourable and preferred option to take. Taking this option will impact on NI Waters ability to respond to events of service outage “no water”, out of sewer flooding incidents. Also extreme weather environmental compliance failures would result in fines. In addition to the damage to the environment, these failures would also create legal problems and potential licence issues for NI Water.

In terms of Roads the resource budget amounts to some £138 million, however, when committed amounts for Public Private Partnerships, salaries and wages, Road Drainage payments to NI Water and other expenditure is taken into consideration, there remains only a budget of some £19.8 million in 2018-19 and £11 million in 2019-20 for energy and maintenance costs. To place this in context a fully resourced service in these areas would cost £43 million. The consequences of the budget reductions would be that only traffic signals would be energised and maintained, with statutory electrical inspection and testing carried out. There would be no routine roads and street lighting repairs outside of strategic trunk roads and motorways, with only a limited reactive response capability. This would mean no grass cutting, no gully emptying, and no repair of almost all potholes. In 2018-19 street lights could be kept on, but there would be no funding to provide a Winter Service (£4.5 million), including salting and snow clearance. In 2019-20 when the reduction in budget is considerably greater, all street lights, with the exception of those on motorways and

strategic trunk roads, would have to be switched off. There would be no funding for a Winter Service.

For Public Transport, due to reduced subsidy for bus and rail services since 2014-15, Translink has maintained the public transport network by sustaining annual losses of around £13 million. These losses have been covered by drawing on reserves but there is limited capacity for this to continue beyond the 2019-20 financial year. There would be a requirement to significantly reduce the public transport network to ensure financial viability going forward. This would require a substantial reduction in service levels. The impact on rural and community transport is equally serious. Service provision would continue in 2018-19 but savings of £2.2 million in 2019-20 would require a fundamental change to the delivery of demand responsive services including Dial-a-Lift services, the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) and Shopmobility. The consequences of reductions of this level are the reduction of some services to the disabled and those in rural areas and potential redundancies within the organisations.

Alarminglly the £1.0 million budget reduction to road safety in each year will mean a complete cessation to all road safety advertising and other educational programmes.

In terms of capital the budget is actually very healthy. The problem is that the Executive, before its collapse, signed off on and ring fenced the funding for the flag ship projects of A5, A6, Transport hub, Desertcreat, Mother and Baby Hospital leaving only £50million per year for the entire maintenance budget for roads, water, sewage and public transport. Civil Servants say they can't change what Ministers have agreed without a new Minister being in place. What is being proposed will actually cost us tens of millions over the next few years as maintenance turns into reconstruction and our roads network deteriorates to an unacceptable and unsafe standard. QPANI believe that the Capital Budget allocations are unbalanced with not enough priority given to maintaining the existing infrastructure we have.

Our Roads Network in NI is valued at some £35 billion and is the largest and most valuable asset the public sector manages. That Roads Network is the veins and arteries through which the life blood of our economy. Our private, public and commercial transport sectors depend on it to transport products, people and services safely and efficiently. Our lack of maintenance and development of our water and sewage infrastructure will impact on public safety, on new housebuilding and our clean water environment. Even the Departments preferred scenario will impact severely on our economy, the safety of road users and result in the loss of hundreds of skilled jobs who are charged with the maintenance of our infrastructure.

Mr Best added "QPANI is calling for the highest political action to be taken to prevent these budget scenarios being adopted as a matter of urgency and on the basis of protecting public safety".

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The Quarry Products Association NI represents approximately 95% of companies involved in the supply of quarry products to the Construction Industry in Northern Ireland. Our

Association draws its membership from companies engaged in providing primary aggregates, the processing of recycled and secondary materials, the production of downstream products such as asphalt, lime mortar, ready-mixed concrete, precast concrete and road surfacing contracting. The Quarry Products Sector now employs over 5000 people across Northern Ireland and has a turnover of some £650 million.

For further information please contact Gordon Best, Regional Director, Quarry Products Association, Nutts Corner Business Park, Crumlin BT29 4SR Tel 02890824078 Fax 028 90825103 email info@qpani mobile 07876 136929