

Pre-Budget Report

What the Pre-Budget Report means for Northern Ireland

December 2006



HM TREASURY

Pre-Budget Report



Investing in Britain's potential: Building our long-term future

The Government's objective is to build a strong economy and a fair society, where there is opportunity and security for all. The Pre-Budget Report sets out how the Government is working to achieve this goal, building on a platform of stability and sustained growth to ensure that the UK can continue to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy. This leaflet sets out what the Pre-Budget Report means for Northern Ireland.

Maintaining a stable economy

The world economy is experiencing its strongest period of growth for more than 30 years. Growth of the UK economy since Budget 2006 has surpassed expectations. This has been driven by further growth in UK business investment, as well as a recovery in the growth of the major European and Asian economies to which the UK exports. The Government's economic reforms have continued to help the UK to maintain macroeconomic stability throughout this period. The Pre-Budget Report shows that:

- **the economy is expected to grow** by 2¾ per cent in 2006, and 2¾ to 3¼ per cent in 2007;
- **inflation is set to remain low and stable**; and
- **the public finances remain sound** and the Government is meeting its fiscal rules. Borrowing is forecast to be £37 billion in 2006-07 and is set to fall further, and debt is lower than in the US, Japan, Italy, France and Germany.

Devolved decision making

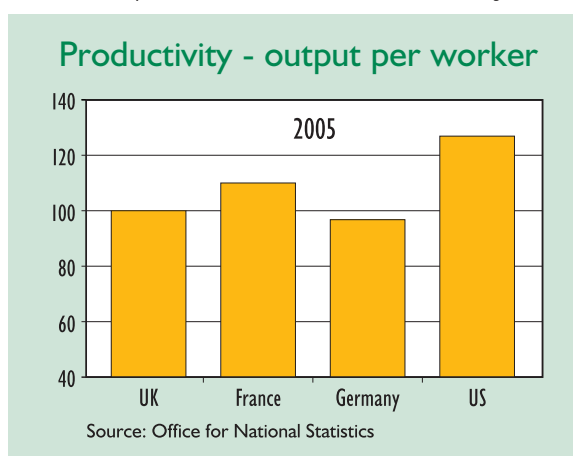
The Government believes that the best way to improve the productivity of the countries and regions of the UK and to overcome regional disparities in economic performance is to allow each country and region the freedom and flexibility to exploit local sources of growth.

The Government is promoting economic growth, full employment and prosperity for all the people of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland departments are working with their business economic partner bodies to encourage economic development in Northern Ireland, supporting employment, entrepreneurship, innovation, skills and regeneration. The Government has published its *Economic Vision* paper, focusing particularly on Northern Ireland's private sector.

Promoting enterprise, innovation and skills

The UK has high employment levels but the amount of output produced per worker – productivity – has historically been lower than in other major economies. The UK's relative performance has improved in recent years, with productivity now higher than Germany and moving close to France. A flexible, enterprising, and high-skilled economy will help deliver faster productivity growth and ensure the UK is well-placed to prosper in the global economy. The Government recognises there are significant regional differences in productivity. In

2005, Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in Northern Ireland was 20 per cent below the UK average. The Pre-Budget Report announces new measures to improve productivity, although in Northern Ireland it will be for the Northern Ireland departments to make decisions in devolved areas of policy:



- **measures to support innovation and health research**, taking forward recommendations for an improved intellectual property framework and new arrangements for health research funding;
- **taking forward reforms to ensure greater flexibility in the planning system**, following publication of Kate Barker's Review of Land Use Planning;
- **greater ambitions for assisted home ownership** through shared equity schemes;
- **reform of the planning, funding and delivery of transport infrastructure**, to maximise the return on investment in transport, following the recommendations of the Eddington Transport Study; and
- **a new ambition of world-class skills**, following the publication of the Leitch Review of Skills.

Delivering high employment

The Government's long-term goal is employment opportunity for all. It aims to promote a dynamic and flexible labour market in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Since 1997, employment has risen by 12.1 per cent in Northern Ireland and unemployment has fallen by 29.6 per cent.

The Government has introduced reforms to improve work incentives and provide support for those on low incomes. Introduced in April 2003, the Working Tax Credit helps to make work pay for people on low incomes and by April 2006, tax credits were helping around 200,000 families in Northern Ireland. The adult rate of the National Minimum



Wage is now £5.35. The Government is taking further steps to deliver higher employment in Northern Ireland by:

- **improving enforcement of the National Minimum Wage** by increasing by 50 per cent the resources allocated to tackle non-compliance.

Building a fairer society

The Government's aim is to build a fairer society in which everyone can contribute to and share in rising national prosperity. The Pre-Budget Report sets out the steps the Government is taking to tackle child and pensioner poverty, to support families and children, and to promote savings. The Government is also continuing to build a modern tax system in which everyone pays their fair share. The Child Tax Credit was introduced in April 2003, to support families with children, help to tackle child poverty, and ensure continuity of income for people moving into work. By April 2006, around 200,000 families in Northern Ireland were benefiting from tax credits. The Pension Credit, introduced in October 2003, provides extra help for low and modest income pensioners and rewards those who have saved for retirement. In the Pre-Budget Report, the Government takes further steps to promote a fairer society, including:

- **a rise of £80 in the child element of the Child Tax Credit from April 2007**, in line with the commitment to increase it at least in line with average earnings to the end of the Parliament. In Northern Ireland around 200,000 families are benefiting from tax credits;
- **from April 2009 every mother-to-be will be eligible for Child Benefit from week 29 of their pregnancy;**
- **making Individual Savings Accounts permanent** to provide greater certainty for providers and savers;
- **measures to promote fairness in the tax system**, including action to tackle tax avoidance.

Delivering high quality public services

The Government is committed to providing new investment in the UK's public services. Spending on public services will be £62 billion a year higher by 2007-08 compared with 2004-05. The Government is determined to secure value for money for the taxpayer and is on track to achieve efficiency savings of over £21 billion by 2007-08, including through a reduction of more than 80,000 civil service administrative posts. This will release resources for front-line services.

The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review will set out the Government's spending plans and priorities from 2008-09 to 2010-11 and will identify what investments and reforms are needed to equip the UK for the future. In preparation for this, the Pre-Budget Report announces:

- **publication of Sir David Varney's review of public service transformation**, making recommendations to join up public services and make them more efficient and responsive to the needs of users;
- **an increase of £100 million** for the Northern Ireland departments as a consequence of increases announced for Government departments. It is for the Northern Ireland Secretary of State to decide how to allocate this increase; and
- **funding of £84 million for counter-terrorism and intelligence.**

Protecting the environment

The Government believes that economic prosperity must be achieved while protecting the environment to ensure a better quality of life for current and future generations. In particular, the Government is committed to playing a leading role in tackling the global challenges of climate change. It is also committed to improving the local environment in the UK's towns, cities and rural areas and to promoting an efficient and environmentally sustainable transport system. The Pre-Budget Report announces:

- **an increase in all rates of air passenger duty with effect from 1 February 2007**, in recognition of the environmental costs of flying;
- **an ambition for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016**, with a time-limited stamp duty exemption for the vast majority of new zero-carbon homes;
- **an increase in the main road fuel duties in line with inflation**; and
- **measures to promote the use of cleaner fuels**, including support for the development of biofuels.

Where taxpayers' money is spent

Total public spending is expected to be around £555 billion this year, around £9,200 for every man, woman and child in the UK. It is set to rise to £585 billion in 2007-08.

