

Rishi Sunak pledges delivery of £600 fuel payment on visit to Belfast's Harland and Wolff shipyard

The UK prime minister has pledged that the £600 energy support payment will be paid to households in Northern Ireland later this winter on a visit to Belfast.

Speaking at the headquarters of shipyard Harland and Wolff, Rishi Sunak assured parties from across the province that the payment is coming this winter as he tried to break the deadlock between the political parties. He said he had been working hard to restore the Executive but issues regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol are still unresolved with the DUP still unhappy with a number of mooted solutions.

Meanwhile, the energy funding is designed to ease the cost burden caused by the soaring cost of energy bills but has been delayed due to issues around how the money will be distributed fairly. It will include a £400 payment as part of the UK support scheme, as well as an extra £200 given Northern Ireland's reliance on heating oil.

The Prime Minister was on a visit to Northern Ireland to welcome the £1.6 billion contract to build three support vessels for the Royal Navy. Harland and Wolff's Belfast facility is one of a number of the company's yards to be part of the consortium to be named preferred bidder in a move which will create 1,200 direct jobs and a further 800 in the supply chain.

The Ministry of Defence named Team Resolute – made up of Harland & Wolff, Bath-based design company BMT and the UK arm of Spanish shipbuilder Navantia – as its preferred bidder for

the construction of three support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

The 216 metre-long ships provide munitions, stores and provisions to aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates at sea and all final assembly will be completed at Harland & Wolff's Belfast shipyard. Other components will be manufactured at the company's Appledore yard in Devon and in its Scottish yards in Methil and Arnish, as well as at Navantia's shipyard in Cadiz in Spain.

The deal marks a remarkable turnaround for Harland & Wolff's Belfast yard which was at risk of closure when it entered administration in 2019 before being bought by Infrastrata. Since then it has won a number of contracts for ship refit and barge building but the latest deal will be regarded as a landmark given the vessels will be the first ships to be built in the yard in nearly 20 years.

Group CEO of Harland & Wolff John Wood welcomed the visit by Mr Sunak and the deal.

"We are proud to be bringing naval shipbuilding back home to Belfast and the facility will be the final assembly point for these three giant ships which will be crucial to supporting the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike strategy," he said. "Harland & Wolff has always said the UK's National Shipbuilding Strategy must generate long term-value for the entire country. With the strategy laying out a 150-ship construction programme over the next three decades, Harland & Wolff's modern yards spread around the UK will make the company a leading candidate to build these vessels."