



Don't let the ghost of Christmas spending haunt you in the New Year"

12 practical budgeting tips + 12 Days of Christmas = a smart financial start to 2009 says Hanafin

"Planning ahead to manage Christmas expenses, as well as regular bills which follow in the New Year is the key message from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service" said the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., today (*31st October 2008*). The Minister launched a new MABS leaflet with tips and a handy planner for families to budget for the additional expenses that occur around the festive season.

"We all know that it is very easy to get swept along with all the hype and fuss which the festive season brings. Taking simple steps and following practical advice from now on will help ensure that you do not get into debt which can seem like a black hole" said Minister Hanafin.

Minister Hanafin also visited the staff working on the MABS helpline at their base in Blanchardstown. **"This service has been operation for just one year, and in that time it has received over 10,000 calls from members of the public seeking help and advice. The staff operating the service offer free, confidential and independent advice for people in debt or at risk of getting into debt."** MABS are funded by the Department of Social & Family Affairs and have offices in 65 locations throughout the country.

The Minister was shown around the training facilities at MABS National offices in Blanchardstown by Business Manager, Annmarie O'Connor who said **"we want as many people as possible to either pick up this new leaflet from one of our offices or else from the website, which has tips to help plan and manage Christmas spending. Putting in the effort this side of Christmas will definitely add up in the New Year."**

Minister Hanafin said that in all the rush to get everything done for Christmas, very often the regular bills such as ESB, Gas or heating can be put to one side and left to mount up. **"Every year we see the massive demands for Exceptional Needs Payments to cover heating and electricity bills which consumers are unable to pay.**



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Between December 2007 and April 2008 over 5,700 payments were made to individuals amounting to nearly €1.5 million for the period around Christmas. Charities also report an increase in funding required to help families to cover the costs of household bills.

It is very easy to get caught up in the frenzy of Christmas, with slick marketing pushing Christmas earlier and earlier each year. Sometimes deciding not to pay regular bills until after Christmas when suddenly they are mounting up is a foolish way to balance your budget.

Over the winter months, increased heating and lighting bills place an enormous strain on household budgets, particularly for those on fixed or low incomes. It is worth householders questioning if they need numerous sets of Christmas lights, giant illuminated reindeers, sleighs, snowmen and Santa Claus decorating their house front, if in January and February they find it difficult to pay increased ESB bills.

This year we should make a real effort to think about the important things around us at Christmas time - our family, friends, neighbours and those who may be delighted with a simple card and some personal contact or company over the winter months."

ENDS



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Editors Notes

Attached below are details of the number of recipients of Exceptional Needs Payments for heating and lighting bills during the December 2007- April 2008 period. The total expenditure on ESB/GAS/Heating for the year 2007 was just over €3million and some 11,700 payments were made. As the table below sets out the vast bulk of assistance is sought for these categories of payments are concentrated in the four months around Christmas.

The purpose of ENP's is to help meet essential once off exceptional expenditure as assessed by the HSE Community Welfare Offices.

ENP Energy payment recipients - Dec'07-Apr'08						
	Dec- 07	Jan- 08	Feb- 08	Mar- 08	Apr- 08	
ESB	327	352	698	480	510	
GAS	169	213	325	281	269	
HEATING	572	363	548	333	279	
Total	1,068	928	1,571	1,094	1,058	5,719

ENP Expenditure - Dec'07 - Apr '08						
	Dec-07	Jan-08	Feb-08	Mar-08	Apr-08	
ESB	80,640	79,542	165,990	115,743	118,763	
GAS	49,908	47,181	84,904	65,378	68,952	
HEATING	158,176	97,661	152,460	94,765	80,982	
Total €	288,725	224,384	403,354	275,886	268,697	1,461,046



MABS Tips for managing Christmas spending

1. Set money aside for bills expected in January. If you can put money aside for the bills you know will arrive on your doorstep in January it will give you peace of mind and increase your enjoyment of Christmas.
2. Don't count on bonuses or overtime payments – if you rely on them and don't get them you will have overspent.
3. Make out a budget of your household income and outgoings to see how much you can afford to spend this Christmas.
4. Use our Christmas budget planner to make a list of what food you need and the people you intend to buy gifts for.
5. Decide in advance exactly what you want to buy and more importantly the amount you can afford to spend.
6. Shop early and give yourself time to shop around for the best bargains.
7. Pay cash if you can. Leave your credit card at home.
8. When buying food and drink be realistic. Shops will open again in a day or two after Christmas.
9. Encourage your children to choose early what they want from Santa Claus - before the advertisers decide for them. Children don't need new clothes for Christmas – if you must buy something make sure they can wear it after Christmas too.
10. Remember good friends don't need expensive gifts. Send a Christmas card or set a limit with family and friends on what each will spend on the other or do a "Kris Kindle".
11. Don't panic if you have no gift for the surprise visitor. Simply recycle and rewrap a gift you have received and not used.



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12.If you are on a low income and are under pressure to borrow for Christmas or are worried about making ends meet this Christmas contact the MABS Helpline 1890 283 438 or your Local MABS to see what options are available to you.

MABS Helpline (for the price of a local call) – 1890 283 438

www.mabs.ie