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Business gurus to guide firms during crisis

TOP business experts in Cork are volunteering their services free of charge to help protect jobs in small firms.

Under a new programme supported by **Bórd Gáis**, Cork Chamber and the Cork Business Association, experienced entrepreneurs and executives will offer free advice to help small businesses survive the recession.

Bórd Gáis has even allowed one of its project managers, Donal Kinsane, to take a leave of absence from the company to manage the new business advice scheme.

A website has been established — www.smallbusinessadvice.ie — to provide information to people on the project, which is the first of its kind in the country.

Local TD Simon Coveney was the behind the establishment of the programme, but he stressed it is not a political venture and it is in no way linked to Fine Gael.

"This project is a voluntary response by the business community to the challenges that recession brings for small business across the country.

"We have assembled a panel of 35 people, with significant business experience, who are volunteering their time to give practical advice to small businesses.

"This is a response from people who do not want to see the country go down the tubes."

The project is due to be officially launched in Cork this month and if successful, it could spread right across the country.

Struggling business owners can apply through the website to be contacted immediately to set up a face-to-face meeting with an advisor.

The business advisors will give solid, practical advice on how to prepare for the tough market challenges.

And while it may not be possible to totally recession-proof a business, the aim of the project is to highlight measures to maximise the potential of a business, to survive and even grow in tough times.

The panel of advisors has not been revealed as some want to carry out the voluntary work without public recognition.

"Businesses are for the first time in many years being forced to aggressively manage turnover and margins and to renegotiate rents and insurance costs. It is a challenging time and many businesses need help but they can't afford to pay for it. This scheme will give them that help free of charge," said Mr Coveney.

● Log onto www.smallbusinessadvice.ie.