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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Junior Ministers Announce Cost Savings for Commissioners**

Junior Ministers Jonathan Bell MLA and Martina Anderson MLA have announced a major cost-saving drive in the operation of their Department's Commissions and Arms Length Bodies.

The Ministers recently visited Equality House in Belfast, currently occupied by the Equality Commission and the Older People's Advocate. The Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People (NICCY) will move in during the Autumn followed subsequently by the Commission for Victims and Survivors.



The co-location of the Commissioners for Children and Young People; Victims and Survivors and for Older People is part of a shared services project which will save around £300,000 annually. The Office of the Older People's Advocate, which will be replaced by a Commissioner in September, has already moved to the new premises. The move is part of an ongoing project, involving the four bodies and the Community Relations Council, which is also sponsored by OFMDFM.

After a tour of the premises, Junior Minister Bell said: "This move marks the beginning of a new way of working amongst our public bodies.

"These key organisations are to be congratulated for their innovative approach in ensuring increased efficiency as they deliver on their individual statutory remits over coming years. In this time of economic restraint, providing value for money and

eliminating unnecessary waste is key.”

Junior Minister Anderson added: “It is vital in this context of reduced public expenditure that all public bodies examine every opportunity to cut back-room costs, while ensuring that the services they deliver, often to the most vulnerable in society, are protected.

“We have worked closely with all of the organisations on this project which has been focused on sharing resources to ensure the effective delivery of the range of important services provided by each of them.”

The organisations have worked together over the last 18 months on a plan which focuses on a range of actions, including co-location. The plan builds upon existing arrangements which focus on ensuring best value between the bodies, including the sharing of IT and other corporate services. The organisations will retain their separate statutory remits and remain independent of each other.

The Older People’s Advocate Dame Joan Harbison said: “I am very pleased to be part of this shared services project which will enable us all to get the best value from our resources.

“The move of my office will precede that of the establishment of the office of the Commissioner for Older People. In making this move, we will be able to ensure that we can make a positive impact on the everyday lives of older people.”

The Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, Evelyn Collins, CBE, added: “Each of us in our organisations hears on a daily basis from individuals about the real difficulties they face. We want to make sure that we are playing our role to maintaining public services across Northern Ireland.

“I welcome the opportunity to share the facilities of Equality House and to work together with the other bodies in whatever way we can to ensure that the promotion and protection of people’s rights are delivered as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.”

Patricia Lewsley, Commissioner for Children and Young People said: “My job is to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people. I will continue to put the interests and needs of children and young people of Northern Ireland at the centre of government decisions and policies. As we move to share accommodation and other services we will be maximising the opportunities to deliver on these commitments.”

Anne Dorbie, Secretary to the Commission for Victims and Survivors, emphasised the importance of promoting and safeguarding the interests of those who have suffered and, in many cases, continue to suffer, as a result of the violent conflict in our society. “Sharing services with other bodies who work to end discrimination, division and disadvantage will enable us to ensure that our resources are concentrated on meeting the needs of victims and survivors.”

Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive of the Community Relations Council, said that the commencement of a new Executive and Assembly was an important moment for the development of Community relations in Northern Ireland. “We need to look again at how to tackle the fears and suspicions which persist in this community and move forward with a policy of reconciliation, sharing and integration. Greater co-operation with these other bodies can help us all with that important task.”

ENDS

*Notes to editors:*

1. The offices of the Older People’s Advocate, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Equality Commission and the Commission for Victims and Survivors will be independent of each other and the statutory remit of each will remain unaffected
2. Details of all shared services will be finalised in 2012.
3. A number of the organisations, including the Commission for Victims and Survivors, Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Older People’s Advocate and the Human Rights Commission, currently share IT services provided by the Equality Commission.
4. Finance Services have been provided to Commission for Victims and Survivors by

ECNI over the last two years.

5. All media enquiries should be directed to OFMDFM Press Office on 028 9037 8142.

Out of office hours please contact the duty press officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.