

# WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

*The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.*

## Social Development

### 2014 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE CONCORDAT BETWEEN THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT

*Published at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 2 July 2014*

**Mr Nelson McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** As you are aware, the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government included an undertaking to report annually to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly on issues impacting on the Sector. In accordance with the principles contained within the Concordat, I wish to present Assembly colleagues with the third report on the implementation of the Concordat. This report includes detail on issues impacting the Voluntary and Community Sector, the progress made against selected commitments contained within the Concordat and progress made against recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee in their report 'Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector'.

The Concordat, which is the formal agreement between this Assembly and the Voluntary and Community Sector, is the means by which we work together as social partners with the Sector to create more responsive and people-centred public services and since its launch in 2011, work has been ongoing to create the circumstances where these outcomes can be realised.

This pledge by government and the sector committing to work together is underpinned by the establishment and implementation of an agreed set of commitments. The report presented today demonstrates how serious this commitment has been taken and how much can be achieved when we work together.

This government has long recognised and valued the contribution the Voluntary and Community Sector makes to the social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural life of Northern Ireland and recognises and supports the independence of the Sector and its right to campaign within the law and to comment on and, where appropriate, challenge government policy.

This is where the Concordat agreement has been pivotal: placing the Sector on an equal footing with the public sector bodies it interacts with on a daily basis and giving the Sector a voice that can now be clearly heard. The Concordat, as a written agreement, has been transformed into a living document with the power to build capacity and the capability to make more responsive and people centred public services by harnessing the expertise available to us.

This is the third report on the Concordat from the Joint Forum and this is what makes the progress on the commitments all the more significant. The report demonstrates that the Joint Forum has tackled

what have previously been considered difficult issues. Last year I reported to my Ministerial colleagues, the tangible progress made on reducing bureaucracy in the administration of funding to voluntary and community organisations. This work has since moved on to develop a Code of Practice which is due to become standard operating practice across Executive Departments later this year. This will make a significant impact on reducing the bureaucratic burden on the Sector.

Significant progress has also been made in the area of policy development with the Joint Forum gaining recognition as a vital link in the machinery of government in stakeholder engagement in the policy development process. The Joint Forum has also provided a platform for Government Departments to communicate with the sector on key issues. Recent meetings have included presentations on the Reform of Local Government, the Welfare Reform programme, the Financial Capability Strategy and the consultation on the framework for the Economic Inactivity Strategy.

The Joint Forum has evolved as an effective, operational body for the implementation of the shared values and principles of the Concordat agreement.

I am very pleased to commend this report to my Executive and Assembly colleagues and to endorse the progress made over the past year. The implementation of the Concordat commitments and the identification and resolution of issues affecting the Voluntary and Community Sector can only assist Government and Voluntary and Community Sector partnership working, which aims to better serve the people of Northern Ireland.

A copy of the report has been published on the DSD website and can be accessed from [http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary\\_and\\_community/vc-publications.htm](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community/vc-publications.htm)