

Foreword

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, I am pleased to present the Assembly's Annual Report for the period April 2002 to March 2003. Publication of the report, despite the continuing suspension of the Assembly, which extended to suspension of the Commission, reflects the Commission's determination to conduct its business in an open and transparent manner. The report gives a full account of the work of the Commission and the Assembly Secretariat during this period, as well as a full statement of accounts.

I would again pay tribute to the members of the Commission who, prior to suspension, continued their hard work, fulfilling their responsibility for establishing and maintaining the necessary corporate infrastructure to support a fully functioning Assembly. Suspension of the Assembly has caused a delay in meeting a number of the Commission's objectives, including the completion of its recruitment programme. Nonetheless, we can present our successors in the new Commission, with a firm foundation upon which the work will continue and these projects can be completed.

The staff of the Assembly also deserve our thanks for their continued dedication and professionalism throughout the year, regardless

of political circumstances. Prior to suspension they continued to provide Assembly Members with excellent services and support, and they responded to suspension proactively and creatively, tackling a range of projects and providing services to other parts of the public service in Northern Ireland and providing assistance to the elected Chambers in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Dublin.

Secretariat staff have also been engaged in intensive preparations for the transition from the first mandate to a new one. As I will not be seeking a new mandate myself, I wish to take this opportunity to thank Assembly Members, particularly the Deputy Speakers and those who have served on the Business Committee and the Assembly Commission, and also the staff of the Secretariat for their support in the five years during which I have been privileged to serve as Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'A. Alderdice'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end.

Lord Alderdice

The Speaker