

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Social Development

### 2015 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE CONCORDAT BETWEEN THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT

*Published at 3.00 pm on Tuesday 30 June 2015*

**Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development):** As you are aware, the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government includes an undertaking for me to report annually to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly on the implementation of the Concordat and in accordance with these principles I wish to present Assembly colleagues with the fourth report. This report contains detail on the progress made against selected commitments contained within the Concordat, including a statement on the impact of the implementation of the 2015/16 Budget on voluntary and community organisations; 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 provides the blueprint for this Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector to work together as social partners to create more responsive and people-centred public services. The report presented today demonstrates that we are capable of working in partnership to achieve mutual aims with two of the most intransigent issues affecting the Sector being addressed and brought to fruition over the past twelve months. Last year the report gave an update on the progress made towards reducing bureaucracy in the administration of funding to voluntary and community organisations. Since then, this work has led to the publication of a Code of Practice which is now standard operating practice across all NI Executive Departments. This will make a significant impact on reducing the bureaucratic burden and bring benefits to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations while, in turn, the Public Sector will benefit from a streamlining of their grant making processes allowing resources to be redirected to more front line delivery of programmes.

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 at the policy development stage. The Joint Forum has also provided a platform for Executive Departments to communicate with the Sector on key issues: presentations have included the Reform of Local Government (Department of the Environment), Welfare Reform (Social Security Agency), Innovation in Supporting Service Delivery (Department of Finance and Personnel), Enabling Success (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment), Public Sector Reform (Department of Finance and Personnel), and the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).

While we can and should congratulate ourselves on addressing some of the long-standing issues of concern I am also acutely aware that Government's commitment to this relationship was recently in the spotlight during the implementation of the 2015/16 Departmental budgets. Our Executive has long espoused the contribution the Voluntary and Community Sector makes to the social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural life of Northern Ireland but at the first 'real time' test of the relationship our commitment to the Concordat appeared to be found wanting. Despite recognising the contribution made by the Voluntary and Community Sector in delivering public services little consideration appeared to have been given to the support these organisations require in order to function, to the longer-term effects of these services no longer being available, the cumulative impact of multiple cuts and the unintended consequences to organisations who underwent a reduction of support from a number of funding departments at the same time.

Such was the concern that when it was brought to the attention of the First and deputy First Ministers they requested that their Junior Ministers carry out a review examining the impact of these funding decisions. I look forward to the findings of this review.

That said 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 can only assist Government and Voluntary and Community Sector in partnership working.

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)