

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Communities

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE NEW DECADE NEW APPROACH (NDNA) REVIEWS INTO THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (NICCY) AND THE COMMISSIONER FOR OLDER PEOPLE (COPNI)

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Mr Lyons (The Minister for Communities): As members will know, my Department currently sponsors 15 Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and was the first to undertake independent reviews into them. I wish to update Members of my Department's response to the recommendations arising from the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) review of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI).

Those NDNA reviews sought to ensure that the statutory functions and governance arrangements, for both Commissioners, remain fit-for-purpose and continue to deliver effectively for the citizens they serve. Following publication of the reviews, I asked my officials to consider the recommendations and bring forward proposals which refresh the foundation of the Department's relationship with the Commissioners. I am committed to ensuring that these offices operate efficiently, maintain independence, and deliver maximum impact for children, young people, and older people across Northern Ireland.

My Department has accepted most of the recommendations. I am beginning the process of necessary transformational change and officials are bringing forward proposals, as necessary, on how the recommendations that have been accepted can be implemented. I recognise that the statutory functions of both Commissioners should be retained to safeguard the integrity of their respective legislation. I agree that the Commissioners should continue to be appointed and enjoy the endorsement of the First and Deputy First Ministers. However, I also confirm my intention to introduce governance and structural reform in tandem with finding opportunities to reduce cost without compromising the Commissioners' independence.

Collaborative working is at the core of this approach. I look forward to working with the Commissioners to help deliver real and lasting change for the communities that we serve. Real impact comes from trusting relationships, honest two-way communication, and shared understanding of challenges. To that end, I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of relationship-building with key decision-makers, strong evaluation and meaningful reporting and I firmly support the development of a revised outcome framework.

While I have not accepted certain proposals requiring legislative change at this time, I am confident that we can make the desired progress implementing accepted recommendations and exploring options for governance and efficiency improvements. I will ensure that my officials continue to engage with relevant stakeholders, to ensure that our response reflects both legislative requirements and best practice in public governance.