

Foreword from the Speaker



The Speaker, William Hay

I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. It reflects on our achievements over the challenging year we have had since restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly on 8 May 2007.

This past year has been an eventful one for the Commission. The publication of a comprehensive review of the Assembly Secretariat launched a radical overhaul of its structure and processes. The review made recommendations for us to build on our corporate governance arrangements.

The review included recommendations in key business areas and presented a dynamic approach to corporate and business planning. Our new Corporate Plan 2008–2011, published in April 2008, outlines a new vision for the Assembly Commission:

“to be an Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people in creating a better future for all”.

It also recommends strategic priorities and values that will help us to demonstrate strong leadership and direction and give the most efficient and effective customer-focused services to Members, citizens and visitors to Northern Ireland.

The review of the management and services of the Northern Ireland Assembly has brought us a period of considerable change and uncertainty. During this period, staff continued to provide a level of service that we can all be proud of. We hope that the Secretariat will continue to progress and build on this success, as the staff’s dedication and professionalism is vital to achieving the strategic challenges outlined in the Corporate Plan.

During the year, the Secretariat has commenced a comprehensive recruitment plan to ensure that there is a sufficient body of skills and experience to deliver our corporate and business plans. A new Clerk/ Director General and five directors have also been appointed and will lead the Secretariat through what will be another busy and challenging year.

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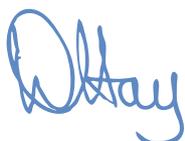
The creation of a new Engagement Directorate gives us the opportunity to further develop our programmes and services to improve the public's understanding of the Assembly. During the past year, almost 79,000 people visited Parliament Buildings attending tours or functions and over 16,500 people took part in the Education Service Programme. These numbers indicate the significant and growing interest in the Northern Ireland Assembly, at home and internationally.

The Business Office has carried out a considerable body of work in the last year. Eighty-seven plenary sessions took place during the period of this report, and over 13,000 written and oral questions were also tabled for answer. The Bill Office has handled 22 Executive bills introduced since restoration. Fourteen of these have become Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee Office has provided support to 645 Committee meetings since 8 May 2007.

The Assembly Commission is keen that the facilities and accommodation at Parliament Buildings are maintained to the highest standards possible. It has begun improving the facilities provided for Members, their staff and staff of the Secretariat. Refurbishment and upgrading of the Chambers and the catering facilities will enhance services for Members, staff and visitors to Parliament Buildings. The Assembly Commission will also be undertaking a full review of the accommodation it will need in the future to meet the demands of all its stakeholders.

As we look to the future and the progress of these projects, I am confident that the building blocks are now in place for the Northern Ireland Assembly to grow and reinforce the Commission's vision of strengthening democracy and creating a better future for Northern Ireland.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Assembly Secretariat in ensuring that the Assembly and the wider public continue to be provided with professional and quality services.



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*The Commission's vision
is of an Assembly
that strengthens democracy and
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