

15 December 2006

## **NEW COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ANNOUNCED**

Minister for Children and Young People, Maria Eagle, today announced the appointment of Patricia Lewsley as the new Commissioner for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland.

Patricia Lewsley has a long-standing record of working on behalf of children and young people in Northern Ireland. She currently chairs the All-Party Assembly Groups on Children and Young People, Disability, Diabetes, Anti-Poverty, and Ethnic Minorities. On the day the Assembly was suspended in 2002, she was due to introduce a Private Members Bill to strengthen child protection arrangements in Northern Ireland, by placing Area Child Protection Committees on a statutory footing.

Making the announcement, Maria Eagle paid tribute to Ms Lewsley's past work for children and young people. Speaking of her future role as Commissioner, the Minister commented: **"I can confirm that Ms Lewsley will very ably fulfil the challenging role of Commissioner for Children and Young People. I have the confidence, and indeed children and young people should have the confidence, that she will take it, mould it, make it her own and, in doing so, will successfully promote and safeguard children and young people's rights and best interests."**

The Minister also made reference to the rigorous public appointment process, from which Ms. Lewsley emerged as Commissioner. She explained that the process had involved young people, and she commended the young people involved for their time and effort. She also explained that the process had

been overseen by an independent assessor, appointed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

In accepting the position, Patricia Lewlsey will be required to cease all political activity, which will mean resigning her positions as SDLP MLA, Lisburn City councillor, and as a member of the party.

Speaking of her resignation she said: “This is about doing what I do currently in a different way. I am passionate about the rights and best interests of children and always have been. My past record speaks for itself. As Commissioner for Children and Young People, I will be able to focus all of my energies on that work and I intend to approach the job with the vitality and enthusiasm the post needs and deserves.”

Ms Lewlsey went on pay tribute to the staff in Office of the Commissioner and to Nigel Williams, Northern Ireland’s first Commissioner for Children and Young People, who died earlier in the year.

“I am looking forward to taking up the post and working with the team to build on the strong foundation put in place by Nigel Williams,” she said.

“I also want to get out and meet as many children and young people as I can – so that they know who I am and what I can do for them. As Commissioner for Children and Young People, I will be a powerful, influential and independent voice for all children and young people. I will be there to represent their interests, to protect their rights and to challenge all those who work with and for children to do better.”

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- Media Enquiries to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, telephone (028) 9052 2659.
- The appointment was made following an intensive selection process which involved eight young people aged between 14 and 18 years and a separate panel of adults, comprising senior civil servants, a leading childcare consultant and an independent assessor appointed by the

Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. A total of 46 people applied for the position with applicants coming from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom and Australia. The appointment process was managed by Veredus.

- The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland is an independent body, the aim of which is to protect and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people living in Northern Ireland. The appointment attracts a salary of £75,000 per annum and the term of appointment is for four years, with the possibility of one renewal for a further period of four years.
- The Commissioner for Children and Young People is supported by a staff of 25, based in Millennium House, Great Victoria Street, Belfast.
- The appointment has been made in accordance with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) NI Code of Practice.
- All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for the political activity of appointees (if any declared) to be published. Ms Lewsley declared membership of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, appointments as a councillor with Lisburn City Council and Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly. She has announced that she will resign her positions as SDLP MLA, Lisburn City councillor and as a member of the party.
- Further information can be obtained from Eilis McDaniel, Head of Children and Young People's Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SR: Tel 9052 3118 or by visiting [www.allchildrenni.gov.uk](http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk).

### **Biography – Patricia Lewsley**

- **Single Parent, with five children and four grandchildren;**
- **Background in catering – trained as a cook;**
- **Worked in community as an advice worker until 1993;**
- **Entered the world of politics in 1993;**
- **Currently SDLP MLA and local councillor in the Lagan Valley area;**
- **Holds the portfolio in the party for Human Rights, Equality and Victims;**
- **Particular interests – disability, special education needs, child protection and women's issues.**