Northern Ireland Office APPENDIX 3

Media Centre

Ministers launch new five-year regional strategy for tackling sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland

Friday 13 June 2008

Health Minister Michael McGimpsey and Minister of State for Policing and Justice Paul Goggins have today jointly announced the publication of a new five-year strategy to tackle sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland.

Speaking at the launch of the strategy, Paul Goggins said: **"Protection of the public from violent and sexual offenders remains a top priority for government.**

"The criminal justice agencies play a crucial role in minimising the risk posed by those with a history of sexual offending. We will deal robustly with those who commit sexual crimes and support their victims as they seek justice.

"Some of the key objectives set out in the strategy's first annual action plan are already being delivered. The Criminal Justice Order which I recently took through parliament includes a range of measures which will enable the courts to send dangerous sexual and violent offenders to prison for longer.

"I am determined to ensure that we reduce the unacceptably high rate of attrition in cases involving serious sexual offences. Too few crimes are reported; too few perpetrators are brought to justice. The proposed Sexual Assault Referral Centre will play a key role in building up the confidence of victims and delivering the forensic evidence that will lead to more convictions.

"The Regional Strategy provides an excellent basis for coordinating work across the statutory and voluntary sectors to effect real change and deliver even more effective services to victims and survivors."

Notes to editors:

1. The strategy was developed by the Inter-departmental Steering Group on Sexual Violence (co-chaired by DHSSPS and the NIO) and will guide policy and service responses from the healthcare, education, criminal justice systems.

2. The draft strategy 'Hidden Crimes, Secret Pain' was the subject of public consultation between 29 January and 27 April 2007 and has been informed by key stakeholders, survivors and support services at a series of public consultation events held in June 2005, March 2007 and April 2007.

3. The strategy sets out a series of robust measures under four key strategic strands which seek to:

•ensure a joined-up, targeted approach by all government departments, agencies and partner organisations (Leadership and Direction strand);

•reduce risk and prevent sexual violence and abuse; (Prevention strand);

•build confidence in the criminal justice system, through an appropriate professional and sensitive approach to reported crime (Protection and Justice strand); and

•provide and deliver easily accessible, co-ordinated, quality support services for victims, survivors and their families (Support strand).

4. The Regional Strategy will be taken forward over the five-year period from June 2008 to March 2013, through a series of annual action plans which will set out specific actions to translate the principles and overall aims of the strategy into practice. The initial action plan, which is published alongside the strategy, sets out key actions to progress a range of issues over the period from June 2008 to March 2009. Implementation of the actions detailed will be the responsibility of relevant government departments, their agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations.

5. Developing proposals for a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Northern Ireland, modernising the law on sexual offences in Northern Ireland and introducing new public protection sentences for dangerous sex offenders, and promoting a public information campaign are just three of the key activities within the strategic action plan for 2008-09 published alongside the strategy.

6. The strategy document

7. Media queries to Sarah Williams, DHSSPS Press Office on 028 9052 2841 or 07791 149246 and Kim Burns on 028 9052 2158 or 07725 761431. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Office via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.