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PRESS RELEASE

Public servants urged to practise good record keeping

Public servants have been urged to follow the principles of good record keeping in a booklet launched today (Wednesday 29th January) by three of Northern Ireland's public oversight bodies.

'Records matter: a view from regulation and oversight bodies on the importance of good record keeping' is the joint work of the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office and the UK Information Commissioner's Office. It brings together their collective experience of carrying out investigations, audits and inspections, and shows through a number of case studies why organisations need to record their key decisions and actions.

The publication was launched at an event as part of Civil Servants' Week in the Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), which included a panel discussion with senior representatives from each of the three contributing organisations. Panel members referred to deficiencies in basic record keeping revealed in evidence provided to the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry. The panel also welcomed the themes of accountability and transparency which featured largely in the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement.

Speaking ahead of the event, the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General, Kieran Donnelly, said;

"Good records management is the very foundation of government accountability, and is the responsibility of all public servants. In sharing our experiences and learning through this new document, I hope we can encourage all public bodies to develop a culture of good record keeping".

Paul McFadden, Deputy Ombudsman at the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office said;

"Now is an appropriate time to be discussing the practice of good record keeping. The 'New Decade, New Approach' document published recently highlighted the need for transparency and accountability in the civil service. Our experience of investigating complaints has shown that members of the public are likely to trust organisations more if they keep records of their key decisions and actions."

Ken Macdonald, Head of Regions for the Information Commissioner's Office, added:

"We know that the job of delivering services to members of the public is a busy and challenging one. However, we are aware that for many organisations the practice of good record keeping is not given the priority it deserves. Records can help to tell us why a decision was made, who made it and when. They are necessary to create confidence in any decision making process, to promote accountability and transparency, and to allow others to verify what has been done."

The publication highlights a number of good record keeping essentials which can be used by all organisations. It states that they should:

- Make a record of all key decisions and actions, as well as the rationale behind them.
- Manage their records and information effectively and appropriately.
- Obtain buy-in from all staff, especially senior management.
- Provide appropriate training to staff.
- Make sure processes are in place to capture records generated by new technologies, including messaging apps.

'Records matter: a view from regulation and oversight bodies on the importance of good record keeping' will be promoted by all three organisations and shared with bodies across the public sector.

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