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Launch of new Coroners Service for Northern Ireland

A new coroner's service for Northern Ireland has been launched today by Bridget Prentice MP, Minister for the Northern Ireland Court Service.

The new service, based in new premises at Mays Chambers in Belfast City Centre, is a significant milestone in the programme of modernisation to improve the quality of service to bereaved families and the wider public.

The modernisation programme commenced last year when the Court Service published a paper: 'Modernising the Coroners Service – The Way Forward'. The paper, which was the result of a consultation exercise, identified a range of measures, such as:

the creation of a single jurisdiction coroners service, located in Belfast city centre, to help achieve uniformity of practice and provide a more effective and consistent service;

revising the judicial structure to include the appointment of a High Court Judge as senior Presiding Judge and two additional full-time coroners in support of the Senior Coroner.

Other reforms, which have been specifically designed to support bereaved families at such difficult times, include the appointment of Coroners Liaison Officers to ensure that families are fully informed and involved in the inquest process.

New information leaflets have been developed including a Coroners Service Charter which sets out the service standards that can be expected, with specific regard to the families' rights to participate during coroners investigations and inquests.

The new premises have been equipped with new IT facilities designed to improve the efficiency of case progression and better information collection and management.

Speaking at the launch, Bridget Prentice said:

'Today marks a significant milestone in the provision of coroner services in Northern Ireland. The provision of an effective service to bereaved families will be at the heart of the new system. I am particularly pleased to see the appointment of a new Coroners judiciary and the appointment of Coroners Liaison Officers, who will provide a personal and individual service to the families involved'.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. The Coroners Service is located at Mays Chambers, May Street, Belfast, however Coroners will travel throughout NI to hold inquests as required.
2. Coroners are judicial officers appointed by the Lord Chancellor. They are responsible for the investigation of deaths reported to them which appear to be unnatural or due to violence, or are sudden and of no known cause.
3. Mr Justice Weir is a High Court Judge and has been appointed Presiding Judge for the Coroners Service. Mr Brian Sherrard and Miss Suzanne Anderson were appointed as full-time Coroners on 1 April 2006; [their appointments were made through the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission]. Mr John Leckey is the Senior Coroner for the Coroners Service.
4. The Northern Ireland Court Service is responsible for the coroners system in Northern Ireland. In February 2004 the Court Service published a consultation paper 'The Coroners Service of

Northern Ireland – Proposals for Administrative Redesign’ which outlined a number of measures to modernise the service. The reforms reflect the recommendations of the Luce Review 2003 on Death Certification and Investigation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There was overwhelming support for the measures proposed and the Court Service published its response to the consultation document in April 2005- ‘Modernising the Coroners Service in Northern Ireland – The Way Forward’. Both documents are available at www.courtsni.gov.uk

5. The Coroners Service has a new website, where more information about the new Service can be found – www.coronersni.gov.uk

If you have any further queries about this or other court related matters please contact:

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