



27 April 2010

## **PLANNING SERVICE STAFF TO PROTEST AT CUTS**

NIPSA Northern Ireland's largest public service trade union has announced plans for protest action by its members in the Planning Service following a decision to cut around 270 jobs.

NIPSA members in all Divisional Planning Offices and Planning Headquarters will protest outside their offices at lunchtime on Thursday, 29 April.

The protest follows the refusal by the Department of Finance and Personnel to make up the shortfall in funding from Planning fees received following the economic downturn. As a result, Planning Service has announced that 270 of its staff (over a third of its staff complement) will have to be redeployed outside the agency. If they can't find other posts they could be made redundant. This is despite the NI Audit Office finding that staff have caseloads higher than anywhere else in the UK and beyond the average annual caseload of 150 cases per officer, recommended in the Addison Report commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, for planning authorities in GB. Indeed if these cuts are implemented planning staff here will have unprecedented caseloads which will have a huge adverse impact on the economy given the current economic crisis particularly in the construction industry.

NIPSA's General Secretary, Brian Campfield has written to the Minister for Finance, Sammy Wilson seeking an urgent meeting and highlighting the damaging consequences for the wider economy. Challenging the notion that staff numbers could readily be cut in light of the recession, Brian Campfield cited the words used by Sammy Wilson only a year ago when he was the Minister for the Environment with responsibility for the Planning Service. Responding on 15 May 2009, to an article in the Belfast Telegraph, Minister Wilson had stated:-

***“Without staff, planning applications cannot be processed and reform cannot be delivered.”*** Critically, he had concluded - ***“in the face of a global economic downturn, it is widely acknowledged Planning Service has a key role to play in supporting the economy of Northern Ireland. Therefore it is essential that we retain the appropriate level of experienced staff to both facilitate economic recovery and support it as it occurs.”***

The protest on Thursday will form part of an ongoing campaign by NIPSA to highlight what they believe will be the harm caused by this decision. Addressing his members, NIPSA's General Secretary said:-

***“Sometimes politicians and the public don't quite understand the value of the services they get from civil servants. But that's not the case here. The irony is that***

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NIPSA represents over 45,000 members in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Education & Library Boards, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, & District Councils.

General Secretary: **Brian Campfield** • Deputy General Secretary: **Alison Millar** • Media Contact: **Geraldine Alexander**

***even the former Minister has acknowledged the vital role played by our planning staff in the economy of Northern Ireland while still refusing to adequately fund the service.***

***NIPSA is determined to bring this issue to the Assembly, to the local councils, the Construction Employers' Federation and to the wider business community, because, quite simply - everyone stands to suffer if these cuts are not reversed."***

**ENDS**