**PRESS RELEASE**

**06 November 2013**

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER ENDORSES FIRST REPORT ON RESPONSIBLE RETAILING OF ALCOHOL CODE**

The first annual report of the Joint Industry Code for the Responsible Promotion and Retail of Alcohol in Northern Ireland was launched today at Stormont and was endorsed by Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland MLA.

Speaking at the launch, Duncan McCausland who chairs the Independent Complaints Panel which compiled the report, said: “We are here today to launch a report on the Code’s first year of operation. The Code was introduced by the industry to tackle issues of irresponsible drinks promotions and wider issues regarding alcohol abuse and misuse in society.

“In its first year, the panel has dealt with 18 complaints, four of which were upheld (against two premises). Throughout the past year the panel have been impressed by the level of compliance shown to the Code by licenced trade.

“The report raises a number of issues including the use of social media in engaging with customers and how licensees should be aware of and control how their promotions are marketed through these channels.”

Commenting on the report, Minister McCausland said: “I am pleased to welcome the first annual report by the Independent Complaints Panel, following their monitoring of the industry’s compliance with the Code.

“The Code demonstrates how government and the industry can work together to bring forward practical solutions to our problems with alcohol abuse. The fact that the Code is self-regulating demonstrates a responsible and robust attitude by the industry. It demands greater commitment to principles of responsible retailing of alcohol than imposed regulation. I am greatly encouraged by the findings of the report and the positive response the licensed trade has shown towards the Code.

“I continue to support any initiatives that aim to address alcohol misuse and its associated problems and offer my support for the on-going work of the independent panel in monitoring compliance with the Code and ensuring irresponsible drinks promotions become a thing of the past.”

Colin Neill, Chief Executive of Pubs of Ulster said: “The majority of the licensed trade recognise the responsibility they have towards ensuring people consume alcohol safely. Our members are adamant that the pub remains the safest place to consume alcohol and it is very encouraging to read the report and see that the Code is working and is supported by the industry and the Minister.

“This report demonstrates the ability of the industry to regulate itself in certain areas and play its part in reducing alcohol related harm in our society. It is our hope that the Code will become a condition under which the granting or renewal of liquor and entertainment licences are granted in future.”

Nicola Carruthers of the Northern Ireland Drinks Industry Group said: “NIDIG welcomes this first annual report and the work that has gone on to promote this joint industry code over the past year. The code demonstrates that our industry is willing to work jointly with the hospitality industry and the government to promote the safe and responsible consumption of alcohol in Northern Ireland, and we are delighted at the first year’s success.”

**- ENDS –**

For further information, please contact Arlene McDermott at MCE Public Relations on 028 90 267099 or arlene@mcepublicrelations.com

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

* The launch was held on Wednesday 06 November in Parliament Buildings, Stormont.
* The Joint Industry Code for the Responsible Promotion and Retail of Alcohol in Northern Ireland was launched in May 2012 by representative bodies of the drinks industry, with the support of Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland.
* The Code came into full effect in September 2012 following a three month period in which licensed trade familiarise themselves with the new measures.
* The Code is a self-regulatory measure introduced by the industry to promote responsibility in the promotion and retail of alcohol.
* It is hoped that compliance with the Code eventually becomes a condition of the granting/renewal of liquor and entertainment licenses in Northern Ireland.
* The implementation and enforcement of the Code is overseen by an independent panel.
* Panel members are:

Duncan McCausland (Chairman)

Deborah Donnelly

Terry Loughins

Rob Phipps

Norman Trotter

Koulla Yiasouma