

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

29 October 2007

### McGIMPSEY LAUNCHES AGE OF SALE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS CONSULTATION

Health Minister Michael McGimpsey has invited views on whether the minimum age of sale of tobacco products should be raised.

The power to amend the minimum age is contained in The Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the primary aim of which is to protect the public and employees from exposure to second hand smoke in enclosed and substantially enclosed public places and workplaces.

The options on which views are being sought are to:-

- Maintain the current age limit of 16;
- Increase the age limit to 17 years; and
- Increase the age limit to 18 years.

Launching the consultation, Michael McGimpsey said: **“Smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of premature death and avoidable illness in Northern Ireland – claiming some 2,300 lives here each year.**

**“The introduction of smoke-free legislation earlier this year has enabled us all to enjoy a healthier work and social environment. This, together with the fact that people are seeking professional help from smoking cessation services in increasing numbers, will undoubtedly help us make progress towards our long-term aim of a tobacco-free society as set out in our Five Year Tobacco Action Plan.**

**“My Department, in collaboration with Boards and Trusts, will continue to encourage smokers to quit. However, I recognise that this is not enough. A key factor in reducing prevalence is to discourage adoption of the smoking habit. Evidence shows that, in Northern Ireland, 79% of adult smokers took up the habit in their teens and that 11% of children aged 11-15 years are regular smokers.**

**“I am therefore seeking views on whether the minimum age of sale of tobacco products, which currently stands at 16, should be raised to help efforts to reduce teenage smoking.”**

The consultation is available on the DHSSPS website at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk) and will last 12 weeks from 29 October 2007 to 18 January 2008. Any change in the regulations will be subject to approval by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

#### NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Copies of the consultation document are available on the Department's website at: - [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/consultations/current\\_consultations](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/consultations/current_consultations)
2. Provisional figures show that 1,696 quit dates were set in May 2007 compared to 564 in May 2006. Information about smoking cessation is published on the Department's website at: - [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats\\_research/stats-pubs.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-pubs.htm) both quarterly and annually.

In addition, figures released earlier this year by community pharmacy smoking cessation

services showed that, in the four months prior to April 2007 – smoke-free legislation was introduced on 30 April – more than 4,000 smokers set a quit date. This is more than five times as many as set a quit date over the same period in 2006.

3. The Five Year Tobacco Action Plan was launched in 2003 and, although it is aimed at the whole population, specific target groups have been identified as disadvantaged adults who smoke, pregnant women who smoke and children and young people.

4. The age of sale was raised to 18 in England, Wales and Scotland with effect from 1 October 2007 and in the Republic of Ireland in 2004. The power to change the age of sale in Northern Ireland is contained within the Smoking (NI) Order 2006, the main provisions of which came into operation on 30 April 2007.

5. Press enquiries to the DHSSPS Press Office on 028 90520575, out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.