



**Embargoed until 1st October 2012**

## **Lisburn social enterprise claims Northern Ireland's 'Business of the Year' prize at the Chamber Awards 2012**

A social enterprise committed to making it easier for parents with children to get into and stay in employment has secured a prestigious achievement for Lisburn after it was announced as the Chamber Awards 2012's Business of the Year for Northern Ireland (sponsored by Westfield Health).

Employers for Childcare Charitable Group (EFCCG), which employs 38 people, beat off significant competition from across the country, impressing judges with its ability to bounce back from cuts in funding to develop a thriving ethical business.

It currently operates two social enterprises in Employers for Childcare Solutions and Employers for Childcare Vouchers, the latter being delivered through the workplace as an employee benefit, saving both parents and employers thousands of pounds each year.

EFCCG's services do not cost the taxpayer a penny and are free to customers. These include a freephone helpline, dedicated Childcare Benefits Advisory Service (CBAS), research, policy and information, a library and a community outreach programme.

There were eight other winners from Northern Ireland, including an expanding burrito bar, a manufacturer of kitchen textiles and an insurer that has developed a smartphone app to monitor driver behaviour.

The full list of Award winners, who are all members of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, includes:

- Alana Interiors' Carol Little (Entrepreneur of the Year)
- Autoline Insurance Group (Excellence in Innovation)
- boojum (Marketing Campaign of the Year)
- Keys Commercial Finance (Most Promising New Business)
- People 1st (Commitment to People Development)
- Shredbank (Excellence in Customer Service)
- Ulster Weavers (Achievement in International Business)
- Williams Industrial Services (Sustainability Award)

President of the British Chambers of Commerce Martyn Pellew said: “There has never been a more important time for businesses to showcase the amazing work they are doing on a day-to-day basis.

“The Chamber Awards is a perfect platform for them to do just that and receive the recognition and profile they deserve for helping move the economy forward and create employment, often in local areas.”

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Chamber Awards 2012 is committed to finding the best businesses through a series of regional heats followed by a National Final, due to be held at London’s Guildhall on November 29th.

Now in its 9th year, the competition is one of the showcase events that highlight the role of business as a positive force for recovery and the success of local communities and individuals.

EFCCG was formed in 2004 after Government funding ceased, with the organisation taking just four years to become entirely self-financing – a unique achievement in a Northern Irish funding context.

Through its two social enterprises it currently processes £21m per annum on behalf of its clients and provides services to 60 of the top 100 companies in the country.

In the last year it has seen business increase by 32% to over £1m, national market share reach 98% and parent participation up 16% year-on-year.

Importantly, the Employers for Childcare Charitable Group has saved parents £6.8m and employers £3m, with all profit generated directed back into its activities.

Martyn concluded: “A record number of firms have taken part this year, all determined to prove that ‘Business is Good’ for the recovery!”

The Chamber Awards 2012 is supported by the RBS Group, BT Business, Dell, DHL Express, Westfield Health and Acua Limited.

For further information or to book your place at the National Awards Final, visit **[www.chamberawards.co.uk](http://www.chamberawards.co.uk)**

**ENDS**

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## Notes to Editors

### Breakdown on the other winners:

**Alana Interiors' Carol Little (Entrepreneur of the Year)** – Located on Pinehurst Retail Park in Lurgan, the family-owned department store offers top brands in home furnishings and fashion.

Originally operating as a niche lighting store, Alana Interiors' product mix now extends to flooring, furniture, household accessories, giftware, cookware, ladies and children's fashion.

Under the customer-centric leadership of Managing Director Carol Little, the company has seen turnover increase 143% over the last four years and a number of improvements to the experience have been made, including the 80-seater Café Alana that is tapping into the growing coffee culture sweeping the world.

Over the last 12 months, Alana Interiors has also developed its online presence to include a fully optimised, e-commerce website ([www.alanashop.com](http://www.alanashop.com)) and establish stores within e-bay and Amazon. As a result, 85% of online customers are from elsewhere in the UK and 15% from the North and South of Ireland.

**Autoline Insurance Group (Excellence in Innovation)** – Employing 130 people across four offices in Northern Ireland, Autoline has evolved to provide clients with car/business/home insurance and a host of financial services.

For the last year, the innovative company has been developing a smartphone app that will monitor driver behaviour and potentially reduce insurance premiums by up to 50%.

It has already made a £2m investment in developing the 'Road Safe Reward App', which was launched at the start of June to major industry and media interest.

Autoline has secured the backing of a panel of insurers who will underwrite policies taken out by clients willing to use the app and is planning to increase initial availability on Android phones to include Blackberry and iPhone by the end of 2012.

**boojum (Marketing Campaign of the Year)** – Set up by John and Karen Bilsard, boojum is a casual burrito bar, serving homemade Mexican food at excellent prices.

It currently operates two restaurants in Belfast and one in Dublin, with the ambitious growth plans resulting in a projected turnover of £2.2m for 2012.

At the heart of its success has been its ability to build an attractive brand and identify the right ways of talking to its customer base, which predominantly is made up of students and young professionals.

The latest marketing campaign was billed as the battle for a 'Free Burrito' Day with fans encouraged to get the most 'likes' on Facebook for their favourite boojum location.

It lasted 2 months and saw thousands of interactions on the Belfast and Dublin fan pages and resulted in a major increase in customers to all three restaurants.

**Keys Commercial Finance (Most Promising New Business)** – Keys Commercial Finance was set up by two ex-bankers in June 2011 to provide working capital against invoices for clients in Northern Ireland.

It is the only locally managed funder in the industry, with all decisions made in Belfast and taken with the view of encouraging business growth and job creation.

The company, which employs 5 people at its Belfast base, has gone from a standing start to generating gross income of £40,000 per month and currently has 23 live clients – 55% ahead of plan.

Keys Commercial Finance's initial growth has been down to its efficiency, professionalism and a growing reputation for transparency and attention to detail.

**People 1st (Commitment to People Development)** – People 1st provide vocational and corporate training for a diverse range of customers, including 800+ private, public and third sector organisations.

With six offices across Belfast, Banbridge, Lisburn and Newey, the company delivers ApprenticeshipsNI, Training for Success, Step to Work and LEMIS to over 2500 learners.

It places a strong focus on up-skilling its own staff to help manage demands from its customers and a learning and development plan covers induction, continued professional development and individual training routes.

A flexible training budget facilitates delivery and allows for additional opportunities as and when they are identified.

All of this has been instrumental in People 1st achieving 'Very Good' status for its graded provision in a recent inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

**Shredbank (Excellence in Customer Service)** – The Belfast company uses state-of-the-art mobile trucks to shred confidential documents at the customer's premises.

Positioning itself as a security business as opposed to a waste management organisation, Shredbank offers one-off unscheduled bulk shreds, regular shredding schedules and project management to include decanting files and lifting bags from various client locations.

It prides itself on its exceptionally high customer service and has reinforced this commitment by securing ISO9001:20008 and appointing a Quality Manager to oversee sales and operations.

The firm, which employs 10 people, has seen 45% growth in 2011 and is expected to turnover approximately £550,000 this year.

**Ulster Weavers (Achievement in International Business)** – Backed by 125 years of industry knowledge, Ulster Weavers is one of the fastest growing home textiles companies, employing 42 people and reporting sales of over £10m by the end of the year.

The Holywood-based firm's products range from cotton and PVC aprons, to cotton and linen tea towels, tea cosies, bags, doorstops and mugs. In addition, it was also appointed licensee by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games to produce official kitchen textiles.

Ulster Weavers' sales outside Northern Ireland have now grown to over 95% and include high-end customers in France, Germany, Italy and the Pacific nations.

This growth is a direct result of investment in export marketing and the business now boasts five members of staff based in China and two in both the US and Great Britain.

**Williams Industrial Supplies (Sustainability Award)** – Williams Industrial Services (WIS) is the largest provider of environmental engineering solutions in Northern Ireland, employing more than 173 people.

The Newtownabbey firm has been instrumental in the development of Glantek, a collaborative network of companies working together to develop clean technology products and processes for waste treatment and renewably energy.

As a lead partner, WIS works with B9 Organic Energy, Clinty Chemicals, Rural Generation Ltd and Silotank to deliver holistic solutions to everyday problems faced by communities across the world.

Outside of this collaboration, Williams Industrial Suppliers has already secured a number of notable low carbon firsts, including the design, installation and commission of Northern Ireland's first indigenous Anaerobic Digestion plant at a value of £1.7m.

## **About the British Chambers of Commerce**

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is the national voice of local business.

The BCC sits at the heart of a powerful nationwide network of Accredited Chambers of Commerce, serving over **100,000 businesses** across the UK, which **employ over five million people**.

For more information visit: **[www.britishchambers.org.uk](http://www.britishchambers.org.uk)**