

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Paula Bradley MLA
Chair
Committee for Communities
Antoinette.bowen@niassembly.gov.uk

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 2556
Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:
Our Ref: ÇOR/0577/2021
Date: 15 February 2021

Dear *Paula*,

Thank you for your letter of 08 February on behalf of the Committee for Communities following the recent briefing from the Presbyterian & Methodist Churches as part of your evidence gathering on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment Bill).

Under New Decade New Approach, the Executive is committed to publishing a successor to the current alcohol and drug strategy. The new substance use strategy "Making Life Better – Preventing Harm & Empowering Recovery: A Strategic Framework to Tackle Substance Use" has been co-produced by the Department of Health, working in partnership with key stakeholders, both inside and outside government, including service users.

Underscored by six population-level outcomes, the proposed vision of the new strategy is that people in Northern Ireland are supported in the prevention and reduction of the harm related to the use and misuse of alcohol and other drugs, and will be empowered to maintain recovery. Supporting people with co-occurring mental health and substance use issues is a key priority within the strategy, with associated actions seeking to remove barriers and improve access by ensuring that our treatment system can better support those with both mental health and substance use needs.

The public consultation on this new strategy has just closed, with responses currently being analysed by officials. The strategy will then be finalised using the co-production model, again with the involvement of key stakeholders, including service users. Consideration will be given as part of this process to the investment required to deliver the new strategy, including funding for alcohol and drug services. Subject to the necessary approvals, it is expected that the final strategy will be launched in Spring 2021.

The harms caused by the misuse of alcohol are a major public health issue in Northern Ireland, and I believe that the introduction of legislation for Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) for alcohol has the potential to be a key population-level health measure to address this issue. I have therefore made a commitment to have a full consultation on MUP once our new substance use strategy is finalised. This consultation on MUP will examine a range of possible options in respect of alcohol pricing, including consideration of the emerging evidence of the effectiveness of MUP following its implementation in Scotland and

elsewhere. Any policy considerations arising from the consultation will be brought to the Executive in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health