

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Dear William

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE EVIDENCE SESSION

Thank you for your invitation to attend the Committee's evidence session on 30 September 2021 to explore the issues raised in the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report entitled 'Addiction Services in Northern Ireland'.

As I have stated before, I very much welcome the publication of this report and the range of issues raised and recommendations made within it. Indeed the NIAO report helped to inform the development process for Northern Ireland's recently-finalised new Substance Use Strategy which seeks to address many of the issues raised and which is to be published very soon.

I am grateful that the Committee recognises the current pressures faced by the Department of Health due to the ongoing pandemic. These pressures are expected to remain as we move into the coming autumn and winter period, and the Department's key priority for the next period will be recovering and rebuilding from the impact of COVID-19. The officials who would be involved in supporting the Department's response to the report and input to the Committee are currently involved in a number of COVID-19 related workstreams. I am concerned that preparing for Committee attendance this autumn would require me to reprioritise resources from the COVID-19 response and recovery to ensure that we could fully address the Committee's questions.

Given this, I respectfully ask that the Committee give consideration to postponing the evidence session to allow us to maintain resourcing on the COVID-19 response and recovery. In the event that the Committee decides to proceed I would be most grateful if the evidence session could be delayed to as

late a date as possible and therefore preferably the 21st October. If you could please let me know your decision. As before, I am content to address any specific queries of the Committee in writing in advance of until such time as an evidence session

Yours sincerely



RICHARD PENGELLY