

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



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Dear William

## **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE EVIDENCE SESSION**

Thank you for your letter of 21 September 2020, requesting me to attend the Committee's meeting on 12 November 2020 to explore the issues raised in the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report entitled 'Addiction Services in Northern Ireland'.

I very much welcome the publication of this report and the range of issues raised and recommendations made within it. I can advise that work is well underway on developing a new substance use strategy for Northern Ireland. The NIAO Report has informed the strategy development process and the new strategy will seek to address the issues raised.

I am very grateful that the Committee recognises the current pressures faced by the Department due the ongoing pandemic – unfortunately the reality is that these are likely to increase significantly as we move into the winter period. The Department's key priority for the next period naturally remains responding to COVID-19.

While I very much recognise and respect the Committee's important role, the officials who would be involved in the extensive preparatory work needed for an evidence session are currently very heavily involved in a number of COVID-19 related workstreams. I am therefore concerned that a session in November may require me to reprioritise resources from the COVID-19 response. Given this, I would be very grateful if the Committee could consider postponing the evidence session until at least spring next year. This would allow us to maintain resourcing on COVID-19 and we should have moved past the additional challenges posed by the coming winter months.

If this approach is acceptable to you, I would, of course, be happy to provide an interim written response to any issues of particular concern to you or any other Committee Members.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Pengelly', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

**RICHARD PENGELLY**  
Permanent Secretary  
Department of Health