

# Written Ministerial Statement

*The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.*

## Department of Health

### THE APPOINTMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUTISM REVIEWER

*Published on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2024*

**Mr Nesbitt (Minister of Health):** I am pleased to advise members that I have appointed Northern Ireland's first Independent Autism Reviewer.

Mrs Ema Cubitt will take up the role in September for a five-year period. Although the Reviewer has been appointed by my Department, the role is independent of Northern Ireland departments.

As members are aware, the growing awareness and recognition of autism places a responsibility on us as a society, to be more equipped and informed in our understanding of autism and in the delivery of our services.

We must strive to ensure engagement and support in the development of our policies and guidance to enable autistic people, their families and carers to feel supported, and to live authentic lives.

I have no doubt that this new appointment will help us do this and will help advance the cross-departmental autism strategy that was published at the end of last year.

The Reviewer's statutory responsibilities will include monitoring service effectiveness and funding, reviewing the adequacy of laws and practices, commissioning research on best practices, and providing annual reports and advice to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Reviewer will also ensure accountability and continuous improvement while maintaining complete independence in her role.

Mrs Cubitt, a qualified solicitor with extensive experience in both private practice and public service, was appointed to the role following a Public Appointments Competition.

Mrs Cubitt's lived experience as a carer in a neurodivergent family enables her to bring a unique insight into the challenges and barriers faced by autistic individuals throughout their lives.

Over the last three years, she has provided unpaid assistance to families and carers facing difficulties accessing support in the areas of social security, education, and employment.

Mrs Cubitt has a personal understanding of the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the public sector. This drives her commitment to these principles in this role.

Members will also want to join me in wishing Mrs Cubitt every success in her new role.