



MEDIA RELEASE

The UK Border: how prepared is Northern Ireland for EU exit?

Today the Comptroller and Auditor General, Kieran Donnelly, published a short report on *The UK Border: how prepared is Northern Ireland for EU exit?*

Mr Donnelly said *'In the absence of certainty around the policy positions of the UK government in respect of the border, trade, customs, migration and the repatriation of powers from Brussels – all matters reserved to Westminster – Northern Ireland's capacity for comprehensive operational planning is severely constrained. Planning to manage the risks in respect of those areas where powers are devolved to the NI Assembly is ongoing. However in respect of those areas where policy is reserved, Northern Ireland is not well prepared for leaving the EU without a deal.'*

The civil service remains engaged with the UK government to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are recognised in the negotiations, but without a functioning Executive its influence has undoubtedly been limited. Negotiations between the EU and the UK are on-going and in the absence of an agreed exit deal, the way ahead on the key issues is far from clear. The UK government's position remains that it will achieve a deal that will mitigate these risks as far as is possible. However, time is running short.

The lack of clarity so far on the shape of an exit deal and a clear way forward inevitably means that Northern Ireland is limited in terms of the practical preparations it can make. It is not fully ready, in operational terms, for a no deal exit. There are also concerns that, whatever the outcome, Northern Ireland's capacity to implement any changes necessary may be constrained given the short time available.

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. Background briefing can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Joe Campbell (028 9025 1097).