Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Section 75 Screening Form

Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy
The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

New

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Given the increased oil prices linked to the situation in the Middle East, the UK Government announced it was providing £53 million of immediate support for those households most exposed to the increased cost of heating oil. £17.2 million has been allocated to Northern Ireland for 2026–27. The NI Executive announced on 16 April 2026 that a further £19.2 million will be allocated to the scheme, meaning £36.4 million is available to the Department for Communities for delivery of the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme. The scheme will provide low-income households, and households claiming specified benefits, with a £100 voucher to be used towards heating oil.

This support will extend to all low-income households, not just those in receipt of benefits, providing rapid and proportionate support to households that rely on home heating oil, with priority given to those in or at risk of fuel poverty, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures while maximising value for money by directing funding where it has the greatest impact.

The scheme will help provide essential support to low-income households who rely on heating oil and are under significant financial strain.

Eligibility to the Home Heating Oil Support scheme will be restricted to households in Northern Ireland who are most at risk of the increased costs of home heating oil.

Eligible households must be in receipt of a specified income-related means tested benefit (Pension Credit, Universal Credit and Income Related Employment and Support Allowance); in receipt of a specified disability benefit, including households where Disability Living Allowance has been awarded to a child; and households with income below £30,000.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

Yes, those with disabilities and older people.

If Yes, explain how.

Individuals in Northern Ireland who are in receipt of a disability benefit along with older people in receipt of pension credit, and who rely on oil to heat their homes, will be eligible to receive a payment (on application), with the restriction that only one payment will be made per residential address.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department for Communities

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department for Communities.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?
No

If yes, are they

☐ financial

☐ legislative

☐ other, please specify ___________________________________

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

☒ staff

☒ service users

☐ other public sector organisations

☐ voluntary/community/trade unions

☐ other, please specify __________________________________

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they and who owns them?

This is a new, standalone scheme that is being set up in response to ongoing oil price increases linked to the conflict in the Middle East.

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for **each** of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
All	Basing eligibility on entitlement to a specified benefit is estimated to capture approximately 481,000 households. Based on an estimated 61.7%[1] of households using oil for home heating, it is assumed that approximately 297,000 households, where a specific benefit is in payment, would be eligible for an award to help with the increased cost of heating oil. In addition to those claiming a specified benefit, it is estimated that almost 50,000 households, with income below £30,000, are not in receipt of benefits. Low-income households that do not receive income-related benefits is frequently due to individuals being in low-paid work and/or having savings just above the threshold for benefit entitlement. Assuming 61.7% of these households use home heating oil, approximately 30,000 households on low incomes, who are not in receipt of income-related or disability benefits would be eligible for an award to help with the increased cost of heating oil. In total, an estimated 326,600 households using home heating oil are deemed vulnerable to the increased oil prices linked to the situation in the Middle East. However given the current data limitations and associated risk estimates, an overall 4.5% (14,860) optimism-bias uplift will be applied to household estimates. This provides a prudent safeguard against data limitations and potential fluctuations with benefit and pension caseload onflows.

[1] Based on Census 2021 – with 49.5% of households on oil only heating and 12.2% on oil and other.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	There is no available data on religious belief, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.
Political opinion	There is no available data on political opinion, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.
Racial group	There is no available data on racial group, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.
Age	The scheme is open to individuals/households most at risk due to the increase in the cost of home heating. Entitlement to the scheme will include those in receipt of child DLA through to pensioners.
Marital status	There is no available data on marital status, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.
Sexual orientation	There is no available data on sexual orientation, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.
Men and women generally	The Department holds data on the proportion of men and women who are in receipt of the specified qualifying benefits. However, there is no available data on men and women generally, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy. The available data on benefit claimants does not provide evidence of the proportion of men and women who will receive a payment from this scheme.
Disability	There is no available data on disability, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy. However, all those in Northern Ireland who are in receipt of a disability benefit, and who rely on oil to heat their homes, will receive a payment, with the restriction that only one payment will be made per residential address.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	The UK Government funding for this scheme has been allocated based on census data, reflecting where the greatest need is, and has been allocated with the expectation that it will be used to support vulnerable households. • PIP has by far the largest disability-related caseload in Northern Ireland (over 220,000 claimants[2]) • DLA and ESA caseloads are legacy and reducing, due to welfare reform • AFIP exists in Northern Ireland but cannot be quantified separately due to UK-wide reporting[3] The available data on benefit claimants does not provide evidence of the proportion of people with a disability who will receive a payment from this scheme.
Dependants	There is no available data on dependants, in relation to the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme policy.

Note to reader - If you are aware of and would like the Department to take into account any further evidence or information relevant to this policy, please send this to:

The Department for Communities
Social Security Policy, Legislation and Decision Making Services
Causeway Exchange
Level 3
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG
E-mail: SSPLD@communities-ni.gov.uk

[2] NISRA / Department for Communities – Personal Independence Payment Statistics (May 2025)

[3] Ministry of Defence / DWP – Armed Forces Independence Payment guidance and parliamentary answers

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details for **each** of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different religious belief have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to these Regulations.
Political opinion	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different political opinion have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to these Regulations.
Racial group	There is no evidence to suggest that people in different racial groups have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to these Regulations.
Age	There is evidence to suggest that older people with lower incomes have a greater need. Older people are disproportionately affected due to lower incomes and higher vulnerability to winter mortality.[4] However, these Regulations will apply to those who meet eligibility criteria regardless of their age.
Marital status	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different marital status have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to these Regulations.
Sexual orientation	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different sexual orientation have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to these Regulations.

[4] ’ COPNI response to DfC Fuel Poverty Strategy

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Men and women generally	There is no evidence to suggest that men and women generally have different needs, experiences and priorities in relation to these amended Regulations.
Disability	It is likely that those with disabilities are more susceptible to increased oil prices, as they may need to heat their homes more often and for longer. All those in Northern Ireland who are in receipt of a disability benefit, and who rely on oil to heat their homes, will be eligible to receive a payment, with the restriction that only one payment will be made per residential address.
Dependants	There is no evidence to suggest that people with dependants have different needs, experiences and priorities in relation to these Regulations.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;

b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;

c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;

d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;

e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;

f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;

b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;

c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;

d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.

b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none**

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Religious belief	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different religious beliefs.	None.
Political opinion	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different political opinion.	None.
Racial group	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people from different racial groups.	
Age	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different age groups.	Minor (positive)
Marital status	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different marital status.	None.
Sexual orientation	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different sexual orientation.	
Men and women generally	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different genders.	None.
Disability	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people who have a disability, the only impact would be positive, as those with disabilities who rely on oil to heat their homes will be eligible to receive a payment (subject to the	Minor (positive).

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	restriction that only one payment will be made per residential address).	
Dependants	The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people with dependants.	None.

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?**

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Religious belief		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Political opinion		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Racial group		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Age		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Marital status		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Sexual orientation		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Men and women generally		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Disability		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Dependants		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none**

Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Religious belief	The proposals outlined in this screening exercise are not expected to have any impact on good relations between people of different religious belief.	None.
Political opinion	The proposals outlined in this screening exercise are not expected to have any impact on good relations between people of different political opinion.	None.
Racial group	The proposals outlined in this screening exercise are not expected to have any impact on good relations between people of different racial groups.	None.

4. **Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Good relations category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Religious belief		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.
Political opinion		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.

Good relations category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Racial group		No – there is no opportunity to better promote good relations between these groups.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?
(*For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*

No potential adverse equality impacts are anticipated.

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

No potential adverse equality impacts are anticipated.

Part 3. Screening decision

In light of your answers to the previous questions, do you feel that the policy should: (please underline one)

1. **Not be subject to an EQIA**
2. **Not be subject to an EQIA (with mitigating measures /alternative policies)**
3. **Be subject to an EQIA**

If 1 or 2 (i.e. not be subject to an EQIA), please provide details of the reasons why:

The Home Heating Oil (Temporary Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 are being made to mitigate the rising cost of home heating oil, ensuring assistance reaches those facing the most acute affordability pressures.

The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people in any of the Section 75 categories. The policy changes are expected to have either a positive or neutral impact on people in Northern Ireland.

The Regulations will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

If 3. (i.e. to conduct an EQIA), please provide details of the reasons:
N/A

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed, or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

No

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

Part 4. Monitoring

Effective monitoring will help identify any future adverse impacts arising from the policy which may lead you to conduct an EQIA, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

You should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, then you should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

Operational colleagues will monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the policy to ensure there are no adverse equality impacts.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	**Position/Job Title**	**Date**
Nicola Boyle	DP	6 May 2026
Approved by:		
David Tarr	Grade 5	25 August 2026

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.