

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 Discretionary Support (Amendment) (Fuel as a Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Revised

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

Discretionary Support is aimed at low-income households, with an annual income less than £29,741.40, not just those in receipt of benefits, providing financial support to those in an emergency or crisis.

The Scheme provides essential support to low-income households who are under significant financial strain.

Discretionary Support is restricted to individuals in Northern Ireland; the need must arise and be met within Northern Ireland.

Given the increased cost of living exacerbated by the increase in oil prices linked to the situation in the Middle East, the NI Executive agreed a package of support to help the most financially vulnerable, on 16 April 2026. As part of this package, it was agreed to remove a current statutory exclusion and allow Discretionary Support awards for fuel to be made as a grant.

All Discretionary Support claims for fuel will be considered in line with other claims to Discretionary Support for living expenses.

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

Yes, all Discretionary Support claimants regardless of their section 75 category.

If Yes, explain how.

All Discretionary Support claimants requesting support for cost of fuel may have their claim considered as a grant if they have no affordability to repay a loan.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Department for Communities.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department for Communities owns and delivers the policy, which only applies to Northern Ireland.

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?

The change aligns with the Department's commitment to reduce fuel poverty and was recommended by an Independent Review Panel in 2021.

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
Religious belief	The Department holds limited data on religious belief in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.
Political opinion	The Department holds limited data on political opinion in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.
Racial group	The Department holds limited data on racial group in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.
Age	The Department holds limited data on age in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change may provide a minor positive impact for older people who are more likely to experience higher fuel costs and who may now be considered for a grant award rather than a repayable loan, where they meet the eligibility criteria.
Marital status	The Department holds limited data on marital status in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.
Sexual orientation	The Department holds data on sexual orientation in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Men and women generally	The Department holds limited data on men and women generally in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.
Disability	The Department holds limited data on disability in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change may provide a minor positive impact for disabled people who are more likely to experience higher fuel costs and who may now be considered for a grant award rather than a repayable loan, where they meet the eligibility criteria.
Dependants	The Department holds limited data on dependants in relation to Discretionary Support claims. The current data is available at https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/dfc-welfare-supplementary-payment-schemes-section-75-statistics-november-2017-to-march-2025.pdf This policy change is not expected to have any specific impact on this Section 75 category as eligibility for Discretionary Support awards will be the same for all claimants.

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

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 beliefs have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.
Political opinion	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different political opinion have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.
Racial group	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different racial groups have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.
Age	Older people may be more susceptible to increased fuel prices, as they may need to heat their homes more often and for longer. The amendment may therefore provide a minor positive impact for some older people who meet the eligibility criteria and who may be considered for a grant award rather than a loan. However, the policy change 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 support with the cost of fuel.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Sexual orientation	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different sexual orientation have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.
Men and women generally	There is no evidence to suggest that people of different genders have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.
Disability	Those with a disability may be more susceptible to increased fuel prices, as they may need to heat their homes more often and for longer. The amendment may therefore provide a minor positive impact for some older people who meet the eligibility criteria and who may be considered for a grant award rather than a loan. However, in relation to awards for fuel, their disability will not have an impact; fuel awards will be treated as any other claim for living expenses.
Dependants	There is no evidence to suggest that people with dependants have different needs, experiences, and priorities in relation to support with the cost of fuel.

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	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people of different religious beliefs and does not create adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	None.
Political opinion	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people of different political	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	opinion and does not create adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	
Racial group	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people from different racial groups and does not create adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Age	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different ages. Some older people may face higher fuel costs due to their circumstances and may therefore benefit from the availability of grant support where eligibility conditions are met. The amendment is therefore considered to have the potential for a minor positive impact for some older people. The amendment 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.	Minor (positive).
Marital status	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people of different marital status and does not create adverse impacts.	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	
Sexual orientation	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people of different sexual orientation and does not create adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	None.

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Men and women generally	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people of different genders and does not create adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	None.
Disability	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department does not expect there to be any adverse impact on people who have a disability. Some people who have a disability may face higher fuel costs due to their circumstances and may therefore benefit from the availability of grant support where eligibility conditions	Minor (positive).

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	are met. The amendment is therefore considered to have the potential for a minor positive impact for some people who have a disability. The amendment 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.	
Dependants	These regulations will amend the Discretionary Support Scheme to remove the exclusion for claims for fuel to be considered as a grant award. The Department considers that the amendment is broadly neutral in relation to people with dependants and does not expect there to be any adverse impacts. The amendment may result in a positive outcome for all eligible claimants by expanding access to grant support for fuel costs. Furthermore, the amendment 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.	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 equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Political opinion		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Racial group		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Age		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Marital status		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Sexual orientation		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Men and women generally		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.

Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Disability		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.
Dependants		No – there is no opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity for people in this category.

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 from 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.
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 Discretionary Support (Amendment) (Fuel as a Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) will expand the Discretionary Support Scheme to allow consideration of a grant award where support with costs of fuel is requested. This means a claimant may be considered for a grant award instead of a repayable loan where they have no affordability to repay a loan. This is a positive change which enhances the levels of support available to all claimants.

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. Should any adverse equality impacts be identified, the Department will review the policy as appropriate.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	Position/Job Title	Date
Hannah Bradford	SO	23 September 2026
Approved by:		
David Tarr	G5	25.09.26

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.