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

Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Policy Framework

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

~~Existing~~/Revised Screening to reflect the outcome of a public consultation exercise carried out as part of the refresh of the VCS Infrastructure Support Policy Framework (First screening carried out in 2023)

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

1. The Department for Communities Voluntary and Community Division (VCD) has established a formal change programme aimed at improving how the Department 'incentivises, supports and enhances community empowerment through an innovative and sustainable voluntary and community sector'.

2. The Change programme has three strands: Charities Regulation; Advice and Debt Support and the refresh of investment in VCS infrastructure support programmes and the development of an overarching VCS Infrastructure Support Policy Framework.

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3. This document will examine impacts on Section 75 groups for the third strand, the refresh of the VCS Infrastructure Support Policy Framework.

4. Department for Communities (DfC) has responsibility for the strategic relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). VCD, part of the department's Communities, Place and Local Government Group (CPLG) has invested in Infrastructure Support funded programmes to VCS organisations for over 20 years, for example :

- Community Investment Fund (CIF)
- Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP- Generic)
- RISP – Women's (Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged Areas)

- RISP - Faith
- Volunteering Infrastructure Support Programme (VISP)
- Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

The programmes were introduced at different times over the past two decades, during which time there have been significant changes including those brought about by the Covid pandemic which highlighted the need for greater flexibility to meet emerging need and highlighted the important contribution of the VCS., To build on this change, to support the sustainability of the sector and maximise impact by working towards shared outcomes, it was agreed to refresh the strategic policy for future investment in sector infrastructure support.

5. Voluntary & Community Sector

The local voluntary and community sector currently promotes equality of opportunity and has evolved to meet the needs of local people in our increasingly diverse local communities, with some focusing on specific groups with specific needs.

Services provided by the voluntary and community sector as a whole, both regional and local, are of benefit to the whole population, including specific categories of vulnerable or disadvantaged people.

6. Policy Refresh

The refresh of VCS Infrastructure Capacity and Support provides an opportunity to develop an integrated policy framework of the various strands of support programmes with the aim of:

- Articulating the department's strategic support role in relation to the sector;
- Recognising the importance of the contribution of the sector to the delivery of outcomes across the Executive departments and local government.
- Clarifying the Department's principles for working with and on behalf of the sector.
- Developing a shared vision for a thriving, sustainable sector with agreed outcomes.

This is an opportunity for the department to target and prioritise our investment in infrastructure support within the sector based on evidenced need and impact. Investment

will be made in a core number of infrastructure organisations which can deliver a baseline of support for the sector against the range of outcomes identified. Evidence indicates the need for both regional and local partners, each providing a complementary role.

To ensure that public investment achieves the greatest possible impact, the strategic direction following this refresh will prioritise the development and provision of high-quality, core infrastructure support. This support will be designed to be inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse and evolving needs of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations operating across all council areas in Northern Ireland.

The intention is to strengthen the foundational capacity of the entire sector by focusing on infrastructure that enables organisations — regardless of size, geographic location, thematic focus, or the communities they serve — to access the guidance, resources, and support required to operate effectively and sustainably.

By adopting this approach, the investment will not only improve the efficiency and coherence of support services available to the sector but also promote fairness and consistency in how support is delivered. It will help to reduce duplication, encourage collaboration, and ensure that all VCS organisations, from the smallest grassroots groups to larger, more established bodies, are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to social, economic, and community development outcomes across Northern Ireland.

7. There is no single database of Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) organisations. Our understanding of the makeup and conditions of the sector comes from the formal register of charities, from surveys of large membership organisations like the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), the Rural Community Network (RCN) and CO3 (the Chief Executive Officers of the Third Sector) and from qualitative feedback from formal and informal engagement with sector leaders, workers and volunteers. It is generally acknowledged that data gaps exist within the sector and as part of this work by working with sector partners, NISRA and local government, we are making a commitment to improving data gathering and a greater understanding on the ‘state of the sector’, collating and sharing information on sector qualitative and quantitative data.

8. It is important to note the policy intent is to provide infrastructure support to voluntary and community organisations rather than directly to individuals.

9. VISION AND HEADLINE OUTCOMES (for infrastructure support)

Sector infrastructure organisations are those whose main purpose includes providing support to other voluntary and community organisations: building capacity and skills within the sector through training, advice, information exchange, convening, policy work, consultancy and providing platforms and access to resources (including physical spaces).

VCS infrastructure organisations play a vital role in supporting and enabling voluntary and community action at both a regional and local level. Some organisations work across the whole region and provide core support to organisations across the sector while other sector infrastructure organisations meet more local or specialist needs or work specifically with a distinct sub-sector of the VCS.

The Department for Communities has invested in the work of a range of infrastructure organisations under various programmes over many years[1] as a way of diffusing good practice across individual organisations and supporting the convening power of the sector – enabling both grassroots action and regional organising around areas of shared interest across the sector. However, DfC is not the only government supporter of sector infrastructure and nor should it be. The nature of the sector means that both public and independent funders have an interest in supporting capacity building linked to specific policy priorities.

The Department surveyed VCS organisations and led an extensive programme of engagement to explore the range of needs and priorities for future infrastructure delivery. This process has confirmed the need for a spectrum of infrastructure support across four headline areas.

[1] For example the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP), the Community Investment Fund, Volunteering Infrastructure Support Programme, Community Asset Transfer

Through a participatory process with a wide range of stakeholders in the sector, a vision and outcomes framework have been developed. A vision for what government support for organisations could help the sector to achieve/what intervention can achieve:

“A confident, independent and collaborative sector which empowers and sustains local action and volunteering; a sector that represents the diversity of our communities and supports the delivery of inclusive and accessible services and programme for government outcomes through partnership, innovation and challenge”.

Headline outcomes:

- Leadership and Advocacy headline outcome:

  Strong leadership and effective advocacy within the sector promotes the interests of our diverse communities and enables community connection and engagement.

- Volunteering headline outcome:

  Volunteering activity is promoted and sustained to maximise benefits for individuals, organisations and communities.

- Core capacity and resilience headline outcome:

  Core capacity and resilience of organisations within the sector is sustained and developed to enable people and communities to thrive.

- Collaboration and partnership headline outcome:

  Effective collaboration and partnership enhance the impact of the sector’s work

10. Renewed investment in sector infrastructure support

Current proposed timeframes are for the commissioning element to be commenced in 2026/2027, with a two-tiered phased implementation of new funding programmes from 2026/2027 into 2027/2028, subject to budget allocations. Timeframes will be subject to Ministerial decisions.

Data currently available includes:

- *"State of the Sector" research produced by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) State of the Sector | NICVA*
- *360 Giving Research Reports, publications and analysis - 360Giving (threesixtygiving.org)*
- *Register of Charities, The Charity Commission for NI Register of Charities*

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

Yes/~~No/NA~~

If Yes, explain how.

The Infrastructure Support Policy Framework will enable support provision to infrastructure support organisations whose activities will make significant impact in the achievement of one or more of the Programme outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive with investment in infrastructure support providing support for organisations which has the potential to benefit all S75 groups, directly or indirectly. Investment may benefit particular S75 groups directly or may benefit S75 groups indirectly through investment in regional or local infrastructure organisations who meet the support needs of these groups, some of which will be intersectional.

The Voluntary and Community Division has supported the Women's Sector for many years through the Programme for Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged Areas (the Women's Regional Infrastructure Programme). Within the updated policy framework, and aligned to its shared vision and outcomes, we will continue to fund a dedicated Women's Infrastructure Support Consortium.

We recognise that the Department is not the sole funder of infrastructure support within the voluntary and community sector; several public bodies and independent funders also invest in capacity building linked to their own policy priorities. The draft policy, issued for public

consultation, included proposals for sub-sectoral support aimed at organisations representing significant groups working with vulnerable demographics. Although some consultees supported this approach, consultation feedback clearly prioritised maintaining a distinct category for Women's Sector infrastructure support over establishing a broad "specialist sectors" strand.

Taking account of the evidence, value-for-money considerations, and Programme for Government priorities, the Minister has decided to establish a separate and dedicated funding stream for Women's Sector infrastructure support. The Minister has also expressed his intention that future funding be organised into four delivery strands which includes the Women's Sector strand, operating within a single overarching policy framework, to ensure inclusive and accessible infrastructure support that meets the core needs of voluntary and community sector organisations.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Department for Communities (DfC)

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Department for Communities (DfC)

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

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 _____

<u>Other policies with a bearing on this policy</u>

What are they and who owns them?

A number of policies and programmes operate in urban and rural communities to tackle disadvantage, tackle community issues and build social capital – including

- People & Place: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal - DfC

- Urban Regeneration and Community Development Framework, and
- Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (DAERA)
- The Strategic Framework for Public Health – Making Life Better – DoH
- Draft Programme for Government Framework – TEO
- Together Building a United Community Strategy (TBUC) - TEO

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.

This policy development process commenced in 2022 with desk research and preliminary engagement with current providers and equality organisations. This was followed by extensive and wide-ranging pre-consultation engagement from March to June 2023, supported by a sector-wide survey. The engagement involved four open invitation Roundtable discussions, in person and virtual; six open invitation Engagement workshops, four in-person, geographically spread, and two virtual events.

A more focussed round of engagement workshops was then held with targeted groups: organisations supporting the Age Sector; LGBTQi+; BAME/Global Majority; Disability and Women. A Reference Group which comprised key stakeholders and Section 75 group representatives was established early in 2023 and met monthly to complement the open engagement sessions in a general advisory and sounding board role. This group met monthly between March 2023 and September 2023 and has been instrumental in shaping the approach to engagement and helping in the interpretation and response to what is being heard through the other engagement mechanisms.

When we talk about the “voluntary and community sector” we mean the collective of independent, not-for-profit organisations that support a wide range of social, environmental and economic outcomes and rely to a large extent on voluntary contributions through their boards of trustees, formal volunteering and donations.

There is no single database of voluntary and community sector organisations and reliance is placed on the Charities register data.

There is general agreement that there are data gaps for the VCS and the draft framework includes a commitment to improving this area by working with for example sector partners, NISRA and local government to boost data for a better understanding on the "State of the Sector" and to collate and share qualitative and quantitative data.

DfC Voluntary & Community Division: Infrastructure Support Review Survey

A survey[2] was carried out as part of engagement for this process with the aim of exploring headline priorities and needs, drawing out different needs within the sector and as supporting evidence for continued investment in infrastructure support.

The sector-wide survey was hosted on NI Direct and ran for six weeks from February to April 2023. The survey was promoted widely through a network of membership organisations and received a good level of response (470 responses from 431 organisations: Baseline set at 431 responses by DfC Professional Services Unit to ensure one response recorded from each organisation) from a good cross section of organisations, large and small, operating at different levels within the Voluntary and Community sector, both urban and rural and across all 11 local Council areas. The aim of the survey was to explore headline priorities and needs of the V&C sector for Infrastructure support.[3]

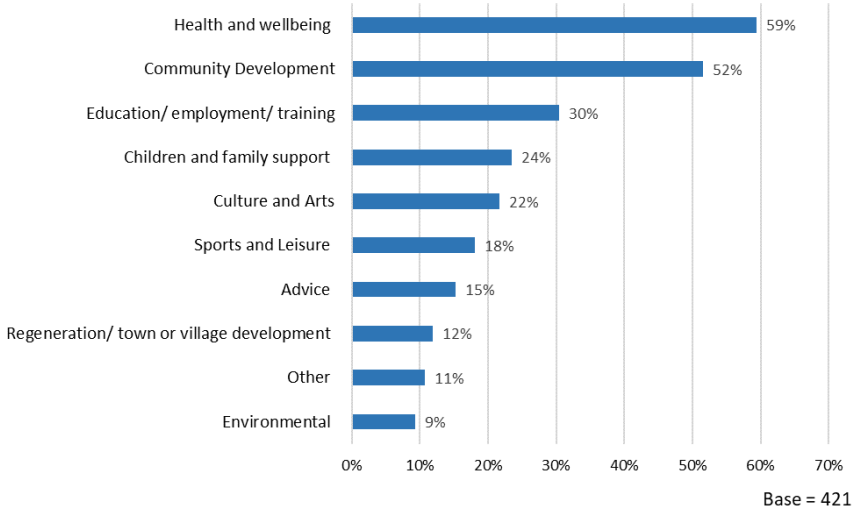
470 responses were received from 431 organisations, 73% were registered charities. (Removing multiple responses to record a single response per organisation, the baseline was set at 431 responses by DfC Professional Services Unit)
Organisations who responded have a wide-ranging remit in terms of geographical spread and work themes.

Geographic area covered by organisation	Percent
Northern Ireland wide	29%
Council area(s)	29%
City or Town	17%
Specific neighbourhood/village/hamlet	26%

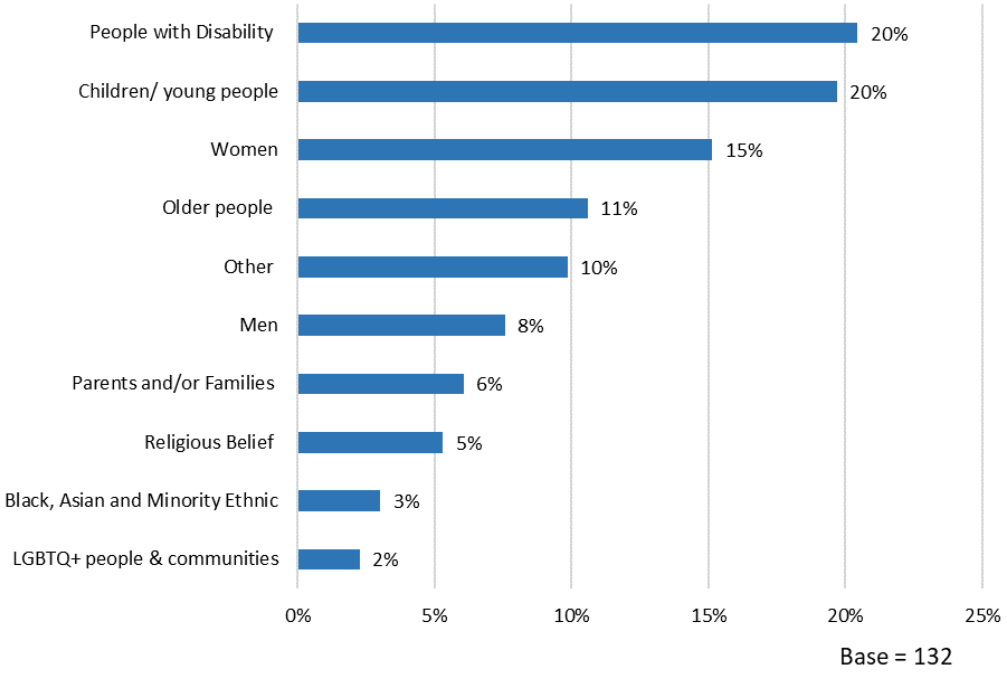
[2] Survey completed Mar/April 2023: initial results (Link). PSU Analysis (Link)
[3] The Department's Professional Services Unit has analysed results from the survey on the VCS Infrastructure Support Review. A copy of the analysis can be found here (insert link)

The main focus of the organisation was reported as:

Nearly three-fifths of respondents (59%) said the main focus of their organisation was health and wellbeing, whilst over half (52%) reported that their main focus was community development. Three in every ten respondents (30%) said their main focus was education, employment or training and around one in every ten respondents (11%) reported 'other' areas as their main focus which included advocacy, housing, debt, history and social interaction for older adults.



31% of respondents stated that their work focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Breakdown in chart below:



Of the 31% of respondents, one-fifth said that their organisation was focused solely or mainly on the needs of people with a disability, with a similar number reporting they focused solely or mainly on children or young people. Around one in every seven respondents (15%) said their organisation focused on women.

Of the 31% respondents, one in every ten (10%) reported focusing on 'other' single communities or demographic groups including people with mental health problems, cancer patients and their families, adults and children who have offended or were at risk of offending and those who were unemployed or economically inactive.

Engagement during consultation phase

Throughout this process, we adopted an inclusive engagement approach bringing together Voluntary and Community sectoral representatives from both urban and rural locations, including those supported through existing funding programmes as well as those who are not.

Our draft Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Support Framework was published on 15 November 2023, and our consultation process ran from then until the consultation ended on 9 February 2024. Over the four months we spoke to over **250** people from a broad spectrum of organisations in the voluntary and community sector, along with other funders and local government.

Our engagement approach during the consultation phase involved a range of methods to listen to and record views on our proposed draft Infrastructure Support framework. This included 6 engagement events, both in-person across Northern Ireland and virtually, additional presentations and meetings as requested which included the women's sector, Faith Forum, local government and internal staff. We held two further meetings with our Reference group which comprises key sector stakeholders and Section 75 group representatives.

The consultation survey was published on the NI Direct consultations webpage (NI Direct – Citizen Space) and publicised via the Department's Twitter Feed, by VCS organisations through their membership databases and through our database of VCS organisations built up through previous funding relationships and also from previous engagement through the pre-consultation phase. A total of **192** responses were received both online and via emailed responses, 88% responding on behalf of an organisation and 12% individuals. 95% of those responding on behalf of an organisation said they were a voluntary and community sector organisation, 3% public sector organisation and 2% funders. Over three-fifths of those responding on behalf of a voluntary and community organisation (62%) said they were a community organisation, whilst a quarter (25%) said they were a voluntary organisation, just 4% a social enterprise and 9% other.

Additional information has been provided through our consultation engagement and survey responses, and the relevant areas of this screening will be updated accordingly.

Register of Charities

Many voluntary and community groups provide services which benefit a range of vulnerable people, for example support for those experiencing poverty, unemployment, homelessness or ex-prisoners or victim support services. The relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage is a stated charitable purpose of over 1,750 charities in Northern Ireland. The charitable purpose of 453 charities in NI is the advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or the promotion of religious or racial

harmony or equality and diversity with over 2655 focusing on the advancement of citizenship or community development in our diverse communities.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	**Census 2021** Key points relating to religion from Census 2021 were as follows: • In 2021, the main current religions were: Catholic (42.3%); Presbyterian (16.6%); Church of Ireland (11.5%); Methodist (2.3%); Other Christian denominations (6.9%); and other religions (1.3%). • In addition, 17.4% of our population had 'No religion' – this is a marked increase on 2011 when 10.1% had 'No religion'. This points to the increased secularisation of our population. • The proportion of the population in Census 2021 with 'No religion' ranges from 30.6% in Ards & North Down council to 7.8% in Mid Ulster council. All councils are more secular in 2021 than they were ten years ago. **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - The advancement of religion is a stated charitable purpose for 1,860 charities - The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity is a stated charitable purpose for 453 charities.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 5% reported their work focussed on Religious Belief. Additional comments provided further information on the focus of these organisations: • "We are a church-based organisation so we concentrate on building a strong community etc" • "To be of a spiritual influence within our community, giving opportunity for those in need to receive help and for people to find a place of community" • "Promotion of religion plus support for disadvantage, the poor and the excluded" **Updated following consultation** **Consultation responses relating to the faith sector included:** • The contribution of the faith sector to the wellbeing of society and the reliance placed on the faith sector by both the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector to rescue people in poverty using funds generated by faith sector donations. • Mobilising the faith sector to meet current challenges is important and since many organisations in the faith sector continue to be self-funded, effective infrastructure is needed to support this cost-effective contribution to society. • The faith sector provides almost 40% of volunteering for the community and provides vital support in many rural

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	locations, yet this proposed framework largely ignores the need for infrastructure support for faith-based VCS organisations. • Support for the faith sector is vital to pull various organisations together to gain mutual support and value. • The faith sector is poorly understood; assumptions remain that social action equates to evangelism or proselytising. The need to better articulate the diversity of faith-based social action remains a challenge, and the absence of a comprehensive overview could leave the way open for faith-based social action being overlooked or ignored. • The faith sector, including faith-based community hubs provide immediate assistance in communities for those facing crisis • A priority need of the faith sector moving forward is the recruitment and support of volunteers in various roles, particularly in voluntary management committee positions.
Political opinion	**Census 2021** The key points relating to the national identity (national identity based) topic are as follows: • In Census 2021, 814,600 people (42.8%) living here identified solely or along with other national identities as 'British'. This is down from 876,600 people (48.4%) in 2011. • In Census 2021, 634,600 people (33.3%) living here identified solely or along with other national identities as 'Irish'. This is up from 513,400 people (28.4%) in 2011.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	• In Census 2021, 598,800 people (31.5%) living here identified solely or along with other national identities as 'Northern Irish'. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011. **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity is a stated charitable purpose for 453 charities. - The advancement of citizenship or community development is a stated charitable purpose for 2655 charities. **DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey** Whilst the survey did not seek information on political opinion, 52% of respondents advised their main focus of work is Community Development with responses received from every local Council area. Responses included those from groups working in the area of Good Relations, Human Rights and those working with Victims of the Troubles.
Racial group	**Census 2021** The key points relating to the ethnic topic are as follows: • On Census Day 2021, 3.4% of the population, or 65,600 people, belonged to minority ethnic groups. This is around

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	double the 2011 figure (1.8% – 32,400 people) and four times the 2001 figure (0.8% – 14,300 people); • Taken together the bulletin reports and tables released today show an increasing diversity from 2011 to 2021 in our population across statistics on ethnic group, main language, country of birth and passports held. This increasing diversity is evident to a greater or lesser degree across all 11 Local Government Districts. • The most diverse Local Government Districts are Belfast (7.1% of the population with a minority ethnic group), Mid Ulster (4.0%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (3.9%). • On Census Day 2021, 13.5% of the population (256,900) were born outside Northern Ireland. Of these, just over two-fifths (40.9%, or 105,000) arrived to live here in the decade to 2021, with just over one-quarter (25.8%, or 66,300) arriving between 2001 and 2010. In total, one-third (33.3%, or 85,600) arrived before 2001. census-2021-Main Languages List of main languages spoken in NI (Source: Census 2021) **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity is a stated charitable purpose for 453 charities.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	- 11 % of charities provide services in support of ethnic minorities. - 7% of charities provide services in support of community safety/crime prevention. - 3% of charities provide services in support of Travellers - 3% of charities provide services in support of Asylum seekers/refugees. - 4 % of charities provide victim support services. **DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey** Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 3% reported their work focussed on Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic groups. 10% selected the "other" option provided and this included supporting the Roma population. The additional comments in relation to the focus of work of some organisations who responded to the survey include work in the areas of diversity and inclusion. **Updated following consultation:** **Public consultation responses included:** • Resources needed to support skills development of Minority Ethnic communities' leadership. • The commitment to respectful partnership working was welcomed and the importance of reducing inequality in society.

<table>
<tr><th>Section 75 category</th><th>Details of evidence/information</th></tr>
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Some smaller charities in the VCS that need an extra level of support to be able to actively participate in relation to issues that affect everyone.
Need to have grass roots BAME communities at the table for true representation.
There’s a need to factor in the need of Minority Ethnic communities including single identity and wider support organisations working across the province.

</td></tr>
<tr><td>Age</td><td>
Census 2021
Census year population estimates by age band (1926 and 2021)
<table>
<tr><th>Age band</th><th>1926 Census population</th><th>2021 Census population</th><th>Percentage change</th></tr>
<tr><td>0-14</td><td>364,400</td><td>365,200</td><td>0%</td></tr>
<tr><td>15-64</td><td>790,300</td><td>1,211,400</td><td>+53%</td></tr>
<tr><td>15-39</td><td>486,800</td><td>594,300</td><td>+22%</td></tr>
<tr><td>40-64</td><td>303,600</td><td>617,100</td><td>+103%</td></tr>
<tr><td>65+</td><td>101,800</td><td>326,500</td><td>+221%</td></tr>
<tr><td>65-84</td><td>97,000</td><td>287,100</td><td>+196%</td></tr>
<tr><td>85+</td><td>4,800</td><td>39,400</td><td>+721%</td></tr>
<tr><td>All ages</td><td>1,256,600</td><td>1,903,100</td><td>+51%</td></tr>
</table>
The key points relating to the demography and households topic are as follows:

Population increase was greatest in the older age groups. The number of people aged 65 or more rose by over 60,000, to nearly one-third of a million people in Census 2021 - a near 25% increase on 2011 and demonstrates the scale of population change due to ageing.
All Local Government Districts showed an ageing population over the period 2011 to 2021.

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Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	• The share of the Northern Ireland population represented by people aged 65 years and over stood at 17.2% in 2021. • The proportion of children aged 0 to 14 (19.2%) is now only marginally greater than the proportion of older adults aged 65 and over (17.2%). • On census day 2021, there were 365,200 children aged 0 to 14, a 10,500-increase compared from the 354,700 children in 2011. In contrast the number of persons aged 65 and over has increased from 263,700 in 2011 to 326,500 in 2021. **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of different age groups: e.g. - 29 % of charities provide services in support of older people. - 8% of charities provide services in support of carers. - 47 % of charities provide services in support of children (5-13) - 42 % of charities provide services in support of young people (14-25) - 20% of charities provide services in support of preschool children (0-5) **DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey** Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 20% reported their

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	work focussed on Children/Young people (comments indicate this includes children and young people in and leaving care) and 11% on older people. **Updated following consultation:** **Public consultation responses included:** • The role of older people's organisations will become more important as the number of people aged 65 and over is due to increase. • Children and youth organisation's voices support for the development of policy and practice which is informed by lived experiences and the need for capacity building for effective involvement of all, particularly the need for training current and emerging leaders to enable the wider sector to reach full potential. • Age sector organisations endorsed the vision and outcomes as being key priorities for the independent age sector organisations they support. • The view of many age sector organisations that regional infrastructure organisations with a remit to represent people who have a protected characteristic under Section 75 should be represented in the group of regional infrastructure partners, ensuring better balance and more effective contribution towards achievement of outcomes. • Children and young people's organisations called for the programme refresh to be used as an opportunity to broaden the Regional Partners group to include organisations representing specific Section 75 groups, ensuring the model is more responsive to rights, equality and social inclusion.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	They added that viewing the women's sector, age sector, disability sector and other sectors as sub-sectoral may be unhelpful as they often serve the whole region in relation to their Section 75 remit.
Marital status	**Census 2021** • There were 693,000 adults who were married or in a civil partnership in Census 2021. This made up 46% of our population aged 16 and over. In contrast 577,000 adults (38%) were single (never married/civil partnered). • Due to changes both in the law and society, the marital status question has changed over time. Given this, longer-term figures are only broadly comparable. That said, in the last 50 years there has been a decline in the percentage of adults who were 'married' - down from 61% in 1971 to 46% in 2021, with a rise in the percentage who were 'single' - up from 31% in 1971 to 38% in 2021. • Over the same time period the percentage of adults who were 'separated, widowed or divorced' has risen from 9% in 1971 to 16% in 2021. Indeed, the number of divorced adults has risen from 3,000 in 1971 to over 90,000 in 2021. • Of the adult population living in households, just over half lived as part of a couple within the household (53% or 794,000 people in a married, civil partnership or co-habiting couple). The remaining 695,000 adults (47%) did not live as part of a couple within the household.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	• Of the 11 Local Government Districts (LGDs), all except for Belfast and Derry City & Strabane had a majority of adults living in a couple within the household. This is in part driven by the fact that these two areas tend to attract younger people to study and work.
Sexual orientation	**Census 2021** • In total 31,600 people aged 16 and over (or 2.1%) identified as LGB+ ('lesbian, gay, bisexual or other sexual orientation'), 1.364 million people (90.0%) identified as 'straight or heterosexual' and 119,000 people (7.9%) either did not answer the question or ticked 'prefer not to say'. • 4.1% of adults (1 in 25) in Belfast identified as LGB+, while 1.1% of adults in Mid Ulster identified as LGB+. • 4.6% of people aged 16 to 24 identified as LGB+, this falls to 0.3% of people aged 65 and over. • Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland (2.1%) has the lowest percentage of people who identify as (LGB+), thereafter comes Wales with 3.0% of people who identify as LGB+ and then England with 3.2% **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity is a stated charitable purpose for 453 charities

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	- 2% of charities provide services in relation to sexual orientation **DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey** Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 2% reported their work focussed on LGBTQ+ people and communities. The additional comments in relation to the focus of work of some organisations who responded to the survey include work in the areas of diversity and inclusion.
Men and women generally	**Census 2021** • The census day population comprised of 967,000 females and 936,100 males. This means that for every 100 females in Northern Ireland there were 96.8 males. • Only in Mid Ulster are there more males than females (300 more males). Belfast has the lowest proportion of males to females with 94.8 males to every 100 females. The pattern of sex ratios is consistent with more rural Local Government Districts having a sex ratio closer to parity and more urban Local Government Districts having markedly more females than males. **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - 31% of charities provide services in support of women

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	- 21 % of charities provide services in support of men **DfC Infrastructure Support Review Survey** Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 15% reported their work focussed on women and 8% solely on men. The remaining 69% of respondents focus on the needs of more than one community or demographic group with many open to all individuals/all communities. **Updated following consultation:** **Public consultation responses included:** • Practical support will be lost if there is no dedicated strand for women's work, and the longer-term risk will be a loss of smaller organisations as a whole at the expense of larger and non-specialist VCS organisations. • Concern about the removal of the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged Areas Programme (Women's Regional Infrastructure Support programme), from regional support and including support for women's sector infrastructure organisations in "sub-sectoral" as 'local'. This represents a failure to recognise the NI wide regional value of the work undertaken by the women's sector and by not holding specific funding, the women's sector regional organisations will have to compete with other local organisations who may have very different niche work.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	• The need for support for men and young lads should be considered. • Many women's groups will lack the eligibility to be able to apply for generic grants and other forms of support, and without the guardrail of a dedicated women's RISP programme, minority and marginalised groups will be lost. • Some women's sector groups stated that there needs to be better connection between the groups represented in the Department's Social Inclusion Strategies (Gender Equality, LGBTQI+, Disability, Anti-Poverty) along with the proposed Racial Equality Strategy. It is important to clearly identify who these specialist groups are and connect Departmental plans to adequate resourcing and partnership. • It is noted in the consultation document that the policy has been screened and 'no adverse impacts' were identified. While this is one aspect of the Department's equality obligations, the Department should also be looking for ways to promote equality, such as the inclusion of groups that are not represented in the proposed partnerships. The women's sector would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Department to help identify opportunities to promote equality. • There is a concern that voices from Section 75 groups may not be sufficiently represented if the Department mainly deals with NICVA and the Joint Forum. Currently, the only 'specialty' groups that are represented on the Joint Forum are WRDA and Disability Action. This excludes a number of other specialty groups or areas (age groups, ethnic minority

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	groups, migrant groups, LGBTQI+ groups, etc.) that may not be able to fully engage or engage at all within this new infrastructure.
Disability	**Census 2021** • In total 1.497 million people, or just under four persons in every five (78.7%), indicated they had 'Good or very good' general health. • The standard of general health falls with age. While less than 1% of people aged under 15 had 'Bad or very bad' general health, this rises to 17% of people aged 65 or more. In contrast nearly 97% of people aged under 15 had 'Good or very good' general health, this falls to half of people aged 65 or more • One person in four (24.3% or 463,000 people) had a limiting long-term health problem or disability, 40% of which were aged 65 or more (185,300 people). • All Local Government Districts had a rise in the number and percentage of people with a limiting long-term health problem or disability in the decade to 2021. The increase was highest in Antrim & Newtownabbey at 32.0% and lowest in Belfast at 17.6% • Census 2021 shows us that 34.7% of people had one or more long-term health conditions (659,800 people). • The most prevalent conditions (whether solely or in combination with others) were 'Long-term pain or discomfort' (11.6% of people), 'Mobility or dexterity difficulty that limits basic physical activities' (10.9% of people) and 'Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing' (10.3% of people). 7

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	• All Local Government Districts had 'Long-term pain or discomfort', 'Mobility or dexterity difficulty that limits basic physical activities' and 'Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing' as their top three most common conditions. • For the first time Census 2021 included 'Autism or Asperger syndrome' as a listed health condition and 35,000 people were recorded with this condition. Of this, 19,000 children (or one child in twenty) had 'Autism or Asperger syndrome' recorded. • A few key results for other listed conditions are 'Emotional, psychological or mental health' 165,100 people (8.7%), 'Deafness or partial hearing loss' 109,500 people (5.8%), 'Learning difficulty (for example dyslexia)' 59,900 people (3.1%) and 'Blindness or partial sight loss' 34,000 people (1.8%). **Register of Charities** The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. - The advancement of health or the saving of lives is a stated charitable purpose for 1169 charities - 15 % of charities provide services in support of mental heath - 13 % of charities provide services in support of physical disability - 11 % of charities provide services in support of learning disability - 6% of charities provide addiction support services

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	- 7 % of charities provide services in support of sensory disability **DfC Infrastructure Support Refresh Survey** Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 20% reported their work focussed on people with disability. Of the 31%, 10% selected the option "other" which included working with people with mental health issues and also working with cancer patients and their families. Additional comments include: • "working with Learning disability community - providers, workforce, people with a learning disability and their family carers." • "working with the Blind and Vision impaired." • "our work focuses on improved mental health and suicide intervention." • "work related to supporting autistic and neurodivergent clients." **Updated following consultation:** **Public consultation responses included:** • Infrastructure organisations and collaborative partnerships must truly reflect the diversity of our society.
Dependants	**Census 2021: Usual residents by age band.**

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information

Age band	Population	Percentage
0-14	365,200	19.2%
15-64	**1,211,500**	**63.7%**
15-39	594,400	31.2%
40-64	617,100	32.4%
65+	**326,500**	**17.2%**
65-84	287,100	15.1%
85+	39,400	2.1%
All ages	**1,903,200**	**100%**

- Census 2021 recorded that one person in eight of the population aged 5 or more (or 222,200 people) provided unpaid care to a relative or friend who had a health condition or illness.
- Census 2021 also recorded how many hours the carer provided each week. One person in twenty-five (68,700 people) provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week.

Register of Charities

The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g.

- 22 % of charities provide services in support of parents
- 8% of charities provide services in support of carers.

DfC Infrastructure Support Review Survey

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
	Just under a third of respondents (31%) said that their organisation focused solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. Of the 31% of respondents, 6% reported their work focussed on parents and/or families.

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland (Phase 3) report (nisra.gov.uk) : Census 2021 Main statistical tables

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	Funding programmes are being developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. There is no evidence from our engagement process that VCS organisations with different religious community backgrounds have differential support needs.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	Improved and supported collaboration and partnership working within the voluntary and community sector at various levels, across geographic areas and sectoral groups is a key outcome under the Infrastructure Support Policy framework. Greater cross-community partnership working between organisations in both communities may be an indirect result, however it is not a key aim. Consultation responses highlighted the important role of faith-sector organisations and the policy framework highlights that in targeting and prioritising investment we will continue to encourage and facilitate a network of faith-based organisations to work together to advocate for and promote shared interests. Through the Core Infrastructure Support Consortium, we will continue to support the facilitation of the Community Faiths' Forum which plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration, representation and social impact among faith-based organisations.
Political opinion	Funding programmes are being developed to support the four outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. There is no evidence from our engagement process that VCS organisations with different community backgrounds have differential support needs. Improved and supported collaboration and partnership working between organisations within the voluntary and community sector at various levels, across geographic areas and sectoral groups is a key outcome under the Infrastructure Support Policy framework. Greater cross-community partnership working between organisations from both communities may be an indirect result, however it is not a key aim.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Racial group	Ethnic minority/Global majority organisations face many of the same challenges faced by other organisations in Northern Ireland. Funding programmes are being developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which support a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. Analysis of the survey findings carried out as part of this refresh has highlighted that some differential support needs exist within organisations across the sector relating to income levels, geographic coverage, work focus, rural/urban locations regardless of the specific group of people being supported by the organisation. Some issues facing BAME/Global Majority organisations relating to infrastructure support were highlighted as part of the engagement completed which included a targeted workshop with BAME/Global Majority groups and these issues have been considered along with all evidence gathered as part of the refresh process. Issues included: • Need for better representation on boards of large regional voluntary and community organisations to ensure voice is heard. • Need for improved communication. • Needs of different global majority groups may be different; there shouldn't be a one size fits all approach. • Number of groups are called on to represent the global majority in NI and with the high number of consultations ongoing people are drained. There isn't the resource

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	available to adequately represent this sub sector across all areas of life in NI. • Language barriers and lack of confidence deter full engagement and contribution. • Difficulty in getting interpreters to cover the diversity of languages required: 15/20 languages. Translation and provision of documents in different languages. • Specialist support needed for example people trained in areas such as Residency/Status etc. Significant demand for this specialist support. • Better signposting would be beneficial and developing a greater awareness of the various organisations that exist who can offer support. Information needed in various languages. • Support regarding volunteering: Specific permissions required for newcomers to volunteer. • There is good interest in volunteering within new communities (can be a pathway to training and work) but sector lack capacity to support it properly – not enough capacity. Some of the issues identified, for example interpreter availability or specialist advice on residency or immigration do not fall within the scope of DfC infrastructure support. Other issues mentioned have been given consideration and it is anticipated that the refreshed programmes within this policy framework will take account of the greater diversity of the voluntary and community sector in comparison to the makeup of the sector when many of

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	the current programmes funded by VCD were introduced. It is not anticipated that there will be a negative impact on organisations working with this sectoral group as a result of this refresh. The drive for greater inclusivity, a focus of our future programmes should have a positive impact. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus and community served, evidence suggests that the core infrastructure needs of organisations across the sector are largely consistent.
Age	Organisations working in the Age sector face many of the same challenges faced by other organisations in Northern Ireland. Funding programmes are being developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way, embedding inclusive principles. Analysis of the survey findings carried out as part of this refresh has highlighted that some differential support needs exist within organisations across the sector relating to income levels, geographic coverage, work focus, rural/urban locations regardless of the specific group of people being supported by the organisation. Some issues facing the Age sector in relation to infrastructure support were highlighted as part of the extensive engagement completed which included a targeted workshop with groups working with the Age sector. These issues will be considered along with all evidence gathered as part of the refresh process.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	Issues included: • The need to be age friendly: Standard facilitation may need adapting: larger font, assistance with online training and use of IT; needs tailoring to suit older people, perhaps intense one-to-one support. • Increased stress associated with volunteering may act as barrier. Reluctance to take on Committee member roles/admin duties/ funding applications etc. • Increased number of referrals for participation in groups (luncheon clubs/allotment groups) from Health Sector without training, support or expertise for volunteers. • Decrease in numbers of older people volunteering as an increased number are working later in life or carrying out increased childminding duties due to the cost-of-living crisis. • Digital skills – “digital divide”: older people often less IT literate, less confident; with don’t access things digitally or take a lot longer to complete returns/applications etc online. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus and community served, the core infrastructure needs of organisations across the sector are largely consistent. The drive for greater inclusivity, a focus of our future investment across all four workstreams should have a positive impact.
Marital status	There is no evidence of any different needs, experiences or priorities by this Section 75 group in relation to Infrastructure Support needs.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Sexual orientation	Organisations working with LGBTQi+ communities face many of the same challenges faced by other organisations in Northern Ireland. Funding programmes are being developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. Analysis of the survey findings carried out as part of this refresh has highlighted that some differential support needs exist within organisations across the sector relating to income levels, geographic coverage, work focus, rural/urban locations regardless of the specific group of people being supported by the organisation. Some issues facing the LGBTQi+ community relating to infrastructure support were highlighted as part of the extensive engagement completed which included a targeted workshop with groups working with the LGBTQ+ community. These issues will be considered along with all evidence gathered as part of the refresh process. Issues included: • The expertise within a small number of organisations is depended upon by various organisations including government to be the voice of the LGBTQ+ space, to respond to consultations, to give advice and guidance on issues/use of language and imagery, Section 75 monitoring etc. No infrastructure support being received. • Many in the sector claim to be an inclusive voice. Need to look at the value of the voice, more evidence of credibility

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	• CaraFriend: funded by Belfast City Council but only for Belfast area. Real need to extend this support/development work to areas outside of Belfast. • Lack of LGBTQ+ voice within regional infrastructure organisations. • Sense of worry in the subsector that we are moving into an increasingly hostile policy environment. Radicalisation of people, extremist views and increasingly far right ideologies coming to the fore. Need support at regional level to challenge the change in policy direction. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus and community served, the core infrastructure needs of organisations across the sector are largely consistent.
Men and women generally	Organisations working specifically with women face many of the same challenges faced by other organisations in Northern Ireland. Funding programmes will be developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. Analysis of the survey findings carried out as part of this refresh has highlighted that some differential support needs exist within organisations across the sector relating to income levels, geographic coverage, work focus, rural/urban locations regardless of the specific group of people being supported by the organisation. Some issues facing organisations working with women in relation to infrastructure support were highlighted as part of the

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	engagement completed which included a targeted workshop with groups focussed on working with women. These issues will be considered along with all evidence gathered as part of the refresh process. • Need to build social capital: resilience and confidence of women to increase women in employment rather than reliance on benefits. Establish as community anchors. • Need for more support for women who arrive at women's groups/centres: variety of issues to be addressed including poverty, violence, mental health issues. • Support for refugees/migrant communities presenting at Women's Centres: support for travel expenses, food including various spices needed for cooking. Cultural importance of cooking. Interaction of these women and children with those from the area. • Large organisations getting funding to assist refugees, many are directed to women's centres, but no resource attached. Targeted engagement with Women's groups was carried out because VCD has historically funded two programmes specifically supporting women: • Women's Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (W-RISP) which provides support for women in rural and disadvantaged areas and commenced in 2013. • Women's Centre Childcare Fund which was introduced in 2008 as an emergency response to ensure the retention of the childcare services provided by the Women's

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	Centres/Groups operating across NI. The allocation to each Centre was based on a 'snapshot' of the perceived funding shortfall within each Centre. This has resulted in some Centres receiving considerably more funding than others with no direct correlation to need or equality considerations. This is not an Infrastructure support programme and is not part of this current refresh. Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) is a key, visible theme in the Programme for Government 2024-2027. The Executive Office describes the EVAWG framework as a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach, co-designed with organisations and survivors, signalling its centrality to current PfG priorities. While EVAWG dominates the public-facing narrative and investment at present, PfG-connected work on women's issues also spans: • Gender equality and addressing structural inequalities • Economic and social participation • Support for women's organisations providing broader services (e.g., wellbeing, advocacy, community support) Women's RISP will cease with the introduction of the refreshed VCS Infrastructure Support policy framework. In line with PfG priorities and strong consultation evidence supporting dedicated support for the women's sector, the decision has been made to shape future investment across four strands, one of which will be a **dedicated investment strand** for the women's sector: the Women's Infrastructure Support Consortium strand. This strand

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	will place renewed emphasis on collaboration and on working towards shared, aligned outcomes.
Disability	Organisations working with people with disabilities face many of the same challenges faced by other organisations in Northern Ireland. Funding programmes will be developed to support the framework of outcomes outlined above. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. Analysis of the survey findings carried out as part of this refresh has highlighted that some differential support needs exist within organisations across the sector relating to income levels, geographic coverage, work focus, rural/urban locations regardless of the specific group of people being supported by the organisation. Some issues facing organisations working with people with disabilities in relation to infrastructure support were highlighted as part of the extensive engagement completed which included a targeted workshop with groups working with disabled people. These issues will be considered along with all evidence gathered as part of the refresh process. Issues included: • Ensure people with lived experience of disability are involved in relevant conversations. Often decisions are made without the end user being consulted or involved. • Transport and accessibility are key issues. Online provision is great in this respect.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	• Don't accept that it's too difficult to include someone because of accessibility issues for example, the onus is on us to work out how to overcome barriers and include those with lived experience. • Lack of interpreters/ cost of interpreters • Lack of sign language training and opportunities to consolidate after training. • Need for resource for reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities in the volunteering sector. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus and community served, the core infrastructure needs of organisations across the sector are largely consistent. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way, embedding inclusive principles.
Dependants	There is no evidence of any different needs, experiences or priorities by this Section 75 group in relation to Infrastructure Support needs. Any issues relating to childcare have been considered under the "Men and Women" section.

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	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations to benefit faith-based groups, directly or indirectly. Consultation responses highlighted the important role of faith-sector organisations, and the policy framework highlights that in targeting and prioritising investment we will continue to encourage and facilitate a network of faith-based organisations to work together to advocate for and promote shared interests. Through the Core Infrastructure Support Consortium, we will continue to support the facilitation of the Community Faiths' Forum which plays a	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	crucial role in fostering collaboration, representation and social impact among faith-based organisations. The level of impact has been rated as “none”, noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	
Political opinion	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations whose focus is community development to benefit, directly or indirectly. The level of impact has been rated as “none”, noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	None
Racial group	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations working with BAME/Global majority communities to benefit, directly or indirectly. While BAME groups have not previously been recipients of funding under the Department's existing voluntary and community sector infrastructure support programmes – and therefore not directly affected by their cessation – this refreshed policy framework, with its emphasis on current context and real-time challenges facing society today, provides an opportunity for core infrastructure support to be underpinned by a Section 75 perspective that ensures equality, inclusion and responsiveness across the voluntary and community sector. In addition to this, the Executive Office's Race Relations and Integration Division supports the voluntary and community sector through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund which provides targeted investment to organisations working with and on behalf of minority ethnic individuals and groups. The fund aims to assist minority ethnic and local community	

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	organisations to promote good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds and is an important source of support to the sector. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	
Age	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations working with both the older age sector and children/young people sector to benefit, directly or indirectly. While Age Sector groups have not previously been recipients of funding under the Department's existing voluntary and community sector infrastructure support programmes – and therefore not directly affected by their cessation – this refreshed policy framework, with its emphasis on current context and real-time challenges facing society today, provides an opportunity for core infrastructure support	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	to be underpinned by a Section 75 perspective that ensures equality, inclusion and responsiveness across the voluntary and community sector. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	
Marital status	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations to benefit a variety of voluntary and community groups working at different levels and different geographical areas, directly or indirectly. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	None
Sexual orientation	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations working with the LGBTQ+ community to benefit, directly or indirectly. While LGBTQ+ groups have not previously been recipients of funding under the Department's existing voluntary and community sector infrastructure support programmes – and therefore not directly affected by their cessation – this refreshed policy framework, with its emphasis on current context and real-time challenges facing society today, provides an opportunity for core infrastructure support to be underpinned by a strong Section 75 perspective that ensures equality, inclusion and responsiveness across the voluntary and community sector. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive. The refreshed policy framework takes account of the increased diversity within the voluntary and community sector compared to the makeup of the sector when many of the current programmes funded by VCD	

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	were introduced. The drive for greater inclusivity across all four workstreams in the refreshed policy framework should have a positive impact.	
Men and women generally	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations to benefit in various communities, directly or indirectly. The current dedicated funding stream Women's Regional Infrastructure Support Programme will cease as this refreshed policy framework is introduced and future investment commissioned. The consultation highlighted strong concern that the removal of a dedicated women's strand would lead to the loss of practical, specialist support and undermine the visibility of the regional role played by women's sector infrastructure organisations. Respondents emphasised the value of rights-based organisations working collaboratively, bringing	Minor positive impact

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	complementary expertise and perspectives that enable a holistic understanding of the issues affecting women and their communities. They also stressed the importance of ensuring stronger alignment between sectoral infrastructure support and the Executive's wider commitments under its Social Inclusion agenda, noting that many structural inequalities disproportionately affect women. The refreshed Policy framework includes a dedicated strand for supporting the women's sector – Women's Infrastructure Support Consortium. This will be commissioned via an open competition seeking to invest in a consortium of Women's sector infrastructure organisations working collaboratively to the agreed policy outcomes.	
Disability	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is expected to be positive due to potential of	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	support for organisations working with people with disabilities to benefit, directly or indirectly. While disability support groups have not previously been recipients of funding under the Department's existing voluntary and community sector infrastructure support programmes – and therefore not directly affected by their cessation – this refreshed policy framework, with its emphasis on current context and real-time challenges facing society today, provides an opportunity for core infrastructure support to be underpinned by a Section 75 perspective that ensures equality, inclusion and responsiveness across the voluntary and community sector. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	
Dependants	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Any impact is	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
	expected to be positive due to potential of support for organisations to benefit this group, directly or indirectly. The level of impact has been rated as "none", noting that any impact as a result of this refresh is expected to be positive.	

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	Consultation responses highlighted the important role of faith-sector organisations and the policy framework highlights that in targeting and prioritising investment we will continue to encourage and facilitate a network of faith-based organisations to work together to advocate for and promote shared interests. Through the Core Infrastructure Support Consortium, we will continue to support the facilitation of	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
	the Community Faiths' Forum which plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration, representation and social impact among faith-based organisations. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Political opinion	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Racial group	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Age	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
	Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Marital status	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Sexual orientation	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes.	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
	Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Men and women generally	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Disability	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	
Dependants	The department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local support to organisations across the sector to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. Despite the diversity of the VCS in terms of geography, thematic focus or community served, the core infrastructure needs of voluntary and community organisations are largely consistent. The Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream will be	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
	competitive with an open call for applications from eligible organisations. This may provide a funding opportunity for organisations not currently in receipt of Infrastructure support funding.	

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	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local core support to organisations to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. This is not a Good Relations Policy Framework, however there may be indirect positive impacts due to increased collaboration and partnership working.	None

Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Political opinion	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local core support to organisations to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. This is not a Good Relations Policy Framework, however there may be indirect positive impacts due to increased collaboration and partnership working.	None
Racial group	Within the Infrastructure Support Policy Framework, the department will invest in sector infrastructure partners to deliver regional and local core support to organisations to meet the ambition of the proposed outcomes. This is not a Good Relations Policy Framework, however there may be indirect positive impacts due to increased collaboration and partnership working.	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	Yes – indirectly through increased levels of engagement, collaboration and partnership working across the sector and potential support for organisations which advocate or provide direct services, including faith-based charities and cross community organisations. Within the refreshed VCS Infrastructure Support policy framework's Core Infrastructure Support Consortium workstream, the Department will continue to support the facilitation of the Community Faiths' Forum which plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration, representation and social impact among faith-based organisations.	
Political opinion	Yes – indirectly through increased levels of engagement, collaboration and partnership working across the sector and potential support for organisations which advocate or provide direct services on a cross-community basis.	
Racial group	Yes – indirectly through increased levels of engagement, collaboration and partnership working across the sector and potential	

Good relations category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
	support for organisations which advocate or provide direct services to ethnic minority/global majority communities, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees.	

Additional considerations

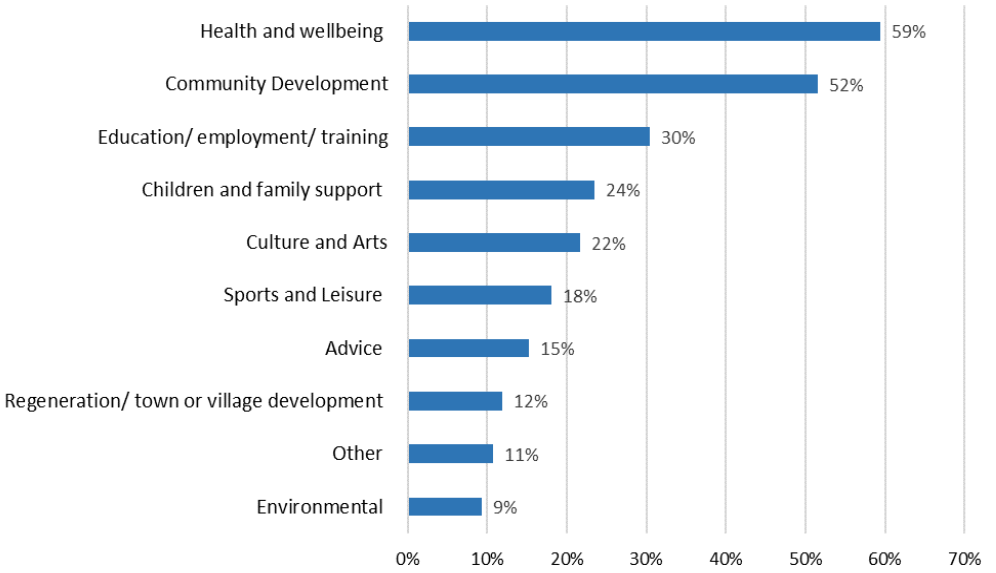
Multiple identity

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).*

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

The evidence considered shows that most charities have multiple charitable purposes and serve a range of different but overlapping beneficiaries.

The survey conducted as part of this refresh highlighted that many organisations operate across a wide geographical area, many focus on several areas of work and the vast majority serve the needs of more than one single community or demographic group.
From a base figure of 431, 29% of organisations stated they covered all of Northern Ireland and the same proportion stated they covered one or more council area. 69% of respondents stated they did not focus solely or mainly on the needs of a single community or demographic group. The table below highlights the diverse areas of work of respondents all working in the voluntary and community sector (Respondents were given the option to select up to three areas.)


Health and wellbeing
59%
Community Development
52%
Education/ employment/ training
30%
Children and family support
24%
Culture and Arts
22%
Sports and Leisure
18%
Advice
15%
Regeneration/ town or village development
12%
Other
11%
Environmental
9%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%

Base = 421

This evidence supports the idea that the majority of organisations in the voluntary and community sector serve a range of different but overlapping beneficiaries with different issues and needs being addressed.

Across the spread of organisations which will benefit from Infrastructure Support funding and the associated maintenance of services we expect beneficial impact across a range of multiple-identity categories. This will apply indirectly to individuals (as potential beneficiaries of multiple organisations) and to groups which are benefited by a service which recognises complex needs.

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:

There is no expectation of adverse differential impact based on the analysis of the available evidence and the nature of the proposed funding application and assessment process.

The Infrastructure Support Framework provides a structure to effectively support organisations within the Voluntary and Community sector to achieve agreed outcomes.

Support provided is to organisations and not individuals. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. It is anticipated that the increased awareness, engagement and collaboration and partnership working as a result of this refresh will have a positive impact on Section 75 groups.

The Infrastructure Support Framework provides a structure to effectively support organisations within the Voluntary and Community sector to achieve agreed outcomes. Support provided is to organisations and not individuals. The department will invest in infrastructure organisations which provide support to a wide range of VCS organisations in an inclusive and flexible way. It is anticipated that the increased awareness, engagement and collaboration and partnership working as a result of this refresh will have a wider positive impact on Section 75 groups.

While VCS Infrastructure organisations vary in their geographic scope or focus – some working regionally, others supporting specific communities or thematic areas – the core needs of the organisations they support are often remarkably similar. Regardless of geography or area of interest, most VCS organisations require the same types of support: capacity building, human resource guidance, digital resilience including cybersecurity and other essential infrastructure services. This commonality presents a strategic opportunity to coordinate infrastructure support for voluntary and community organisations more effectively and ensure equitable access to essential resources across the sector.

In the context of the Minister's decision, this policy prioritises core mainstream investment across Northern Ireland and also investment in support that is available to organisations in a locality, a more distinct geographical area that is open, inclusive, and designed to support a broad range of organisations. There will also be a distinct funding stream for volunteering support and investment in women's sector infrastructure organisations. While this approach cannot meet every specific or individual need, it aims to provide a foundation of support that reaches a larger number of groups and delivers the greatest overall impact. This reflects the Minister's wish to use limited public funding in a way that is equitable, transparent, and aligned with our strategic objective to strengthen the sector as a whole.

The funding streams within this VCS Infrastucture Support Policy Framework will be introduced in a phased two-tier approach, planned to commence in Autumn 2026, followed by the second phase in Spring 2027. Funding of current VSC infrastructure support programmes will continue until new programmes commence as a support for currently funded organisations through transition. During this time, the Department will engage with and support sector organisations through the developmental process and application stages.

A competitive funding process is planned for two funding streams: the Women's Infrastructure Support Consortium workstream and the Local Infrastructure Support Consortia workstream, and the process will be open to all VCS organisations who consider they meet eligibility criteria. There are a large number of organisations in the community development space, who provide support across a wide and diverse range of areas and interests including supporting vulnerable demographic groups. Investing strategically in a more integrated way, aligned to shared outcomes, will strengthen and increase the future long-term sustainability of voluntary and community organisations.

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

<u>Mitigation</u>

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?

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

Mitigating Actions
N/A

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:

Section 75 monitoring will be carried out for two years following policy implementation. The purpose of this is to ensure the policy delivers as anticipated and also addresses any potential inequalities. Commissioning and implementation is currently planned on a phased two-tier basis, with commissioning commencing in 2026/2027, subject to budget confirmation.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	**Position/Job Title**	**Date**
Aideen Logue	DP	16/02/2026
Approved by:		
Lorraine Gallagher	Grade 7	27/02/2026
Ray Caldwell	Director	02/03/2026

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.

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Religion (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - National identity (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Ethnic group (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Demography and households (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Sexual orientation (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 population and household estimates for Northern Ireland: Statistical bulletin (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Marital or civil partnership status & Household relationships (couples) (nisra.gov.uk)

Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Health (nisra.gov.uk)