

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland



Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2017-18

Contact:

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Action Plan	As above ✓ Name: Telephone: Email:

Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

Annual Report and Accounts for 2017-18:

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%20-%202017%20-%202018.PDF>

Draft Corporate Plan for 2016-21 and Forward Work Programme for 2017-18 (pending finalisation of the Programme for Government and Ministerial approval):

<http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/events/draft-corporate-plan-and-draft-forward-work-programme-consultation-event/>

Signature:

Maeve Holly

This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

Section 1: Equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice

- 1 In 2017-18, please provide **examples** of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

The Consumer Council works to actively promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland. During 2017-18, we have looked to make a real difference for consumers by continuing to develop the five strategic aims of our 2016-21 Corporate Plan:

1. Empowering consumers;
2. Representing consumers;
3. Protecting consumers;
4. Understanding the needs of future consumers and
5. Providing value for money and good governance.

Key equality outcomes achieved during 2017-18 were:

- Achieved Silver Investors in People Award, under the new sixth generation framework. The Consumer Council achieved a benchmarked performance higher than the public sector average across all of nine indicators, and in some areas significantly so (Leading and Inspiring People, Recognising and Rewarding High Performance and Creating Sustainable Success). Equality categories impacted: age, gender, marital status, gender.
- Received the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation, where we gained 'compliance plus' in seven criteria (best practice), 'compliant' in 45 criteria and 'partial' in 5 criteria (total 57 criteria). Equality categories impacted: Age, disability, gender, marital status, race.
- Had a 48% increase in Stage 2 complaints and a 5% increase on overall enquiries and complaints. This has resulted in a total of £141k being returned back to 365 consumers across Northern Ireland. Equality categories impacted: Age, disability, gender, marital status, race, disability.
- Had a 13% increase in visits to The Consumer Council website, Facebook followers have increased by 117%, Twitter followers by 9%, and press and broadcast coverage has increased by 33%. Equality categories impacted: Age, disability, gender, marital status, race.

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- Continued the 'Guided Consumer Badge', in partnership with Girlguiding Ulster, which has seen 179 Girl Guide Units across Northern Ireland using the resource. This has enabled 1,218 Girl Guides to learn about their consumer rights, manage their money and how to become a responsible consumers. Equality categories impacted: age, gender.
- Participated at 53 events and delivered 57 presentations across Northern Ireland. Through this outreach work, we have engaged with over 5,000 consumers. Equality categories impacted: Age, disability, gender, marital status, race.
- Reviewed changes to The Post Office as part of the Network Transformation Programme. This included changes to post office service delivery in Coleraine and Banbridge, and relocations in Ballymena, Moira, Belfast, Newry and Dungannon. Through this work The Consumer Council sought and gained assurances from Post Office Ltd around privacy levels and ease of access for those with a disability. Equality categories impacted: disability.
- Conducted access audit site visits at Translink bus and rail stations, City of Derry Airport and on board the Stena Line crossing from Belfast to Cairnryan, with passengers who have disabilities and/or reduced mobility. Participants made suggestions for improvements across a range of areas such as signage, car parking, available wheelchairs, facilities for assistance dogs and seating. Equality categories impacted: disability
- Received a highly commended award from Belfast Healthy Cities Awards 2017 for our transport access programme audits. Equality categories impacted: disability
- Represented consumers at the interdepartmental and interagency Regional Community Resilience Group and sub-groups helping to develop household and community resilience, focusing primarily on flood risk. Equality categories impacted: Age, disability, gender, marital status, race.
- Ran a Consumer Parliament event in Londonderry/Derry in March 2018 to give consumers the opportunity to tell us about the consumer issues affecting them. Age, disability, gender, marital status, race.

- 2 Please provide **examples** of outcomes and/or the impact of **equality action plans/** measures in 2017-18 (or append the plan with progress/examples identified).

Project Description	Anticipated Outputs for this Project	Performance
<p>Develop educational partnerships with Scouts NI and the Boys Brigade on a range of consumer issues. The activities will be designed for educators/group leaders to use to raise awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities, and for learners to develop their skills and confidence to deal with consumer issues.</p>	<p>To develop education programmes with educational and youth sectors to develop consumer skills and confidence. To build on the success with groups such as the Girl Guides Association; we aim to work with at least two educational and youth sector partners throughout 2017/18.</p>	<p>Project fully delivered</p> <p>An educational partnership was launched with Scouts NI in November 2017 to teach young people aged 10½-14 about their consumer rights through interactive games and activities. Sammy Wilson MP officially launched the initiative and awarded the first badges and certificates to the Islandmagee Scouts. The launch was covered in BBC Ulster's On Your Behalf show, and BBC's Noel Thompson and Linda McAuley recorded a congratulations message for the evening launch.</p> <p>We also began work on a resource for Boy's Brigade, which will be launched in 2018/19. This resource has been designed for the company section (age 11-15) and senior section (age 15-18) and focus on consumer rights and the development of life skills such as budgeting, managing household bills and opening a bank account.</p> <p>We continued to support our 'Guided Consumer Badge' initiative, which was delivered in partnership with Girlguiding Ulster. 179 Girl Guide Units across Northern Ireland used the resource, enabling 1,218 Girl Guides to learn about their consumer rights, manage their money and become responsible consumers.</p> <p>In addition to work with uniformed groups aimed at raising young people's consumer skills, The Consumer Council decided to update the Student Survival Guide. This resource included tips on living independently, managing household bills, budgeting, and consumer rights. This was</p>

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		distributed electronically to 178,000 students at Queens University, Ulster University, CAFRE and the six regional colleges. In addition, we undertook presentations at Belfast Metropolitan College with students with moderate learning difficulties, and students and staff at Southern Regional College.
Undertake a consumer “parliament” to allow consumers from across Northern Ireland to have their say on the issues that matter to them.	To hear the views of consumers from across Northern Ireland and provide a forum for them to discuss concerns they have. It will enable consumer issues to be identified and debated. The event will also provide an opportunity to provide consumers with education and advice. Following the event a report will be produced highlighting consumer recommendations for policy-makers and regulators.	Project fully delivered A Consumer Parliament was held at the Guildhall, Londonderry, on 23 rd March. Some consumers filled in a pre- enrolment survey to inform us of their consumer issues prior to the event. This included a section on disability and any special assistance required to access the event. Consumers took part in four breakout sessions to discuss issues of concern in energy, flooding, transport, postal services, broadband and telecoms. A Consumer Clinic was run simultaneously throughout the day providing information and advice. Twenty partner organisations provided information stands. A report highlighting the issues raised has been completed and published.
Work with Translink and disability groups to complete a Bus and Rail Station accessibility audit. This will complement the work that has been undertaken at the Northern Ireland Airports and Ferry Terminals.	To work in partnership with Translink and disability groups to develop an understanding of the needs of passengers with disabilities, in order to improve their overall travelling experience.	Project fully delivered The Consumer Council facilitated a site visit in partnership with Translink and participants with a range of disabilities and mobility needs in August 2017. Feedback was gathered from participants and formed part of the report submitted to Translink with a number of recommendations. The Consumer Council continues to work with Translink to progress the recommendations made.
Work with Stena Line Belfast Terminal to review disability and reduced mobility access.	Consumer with a disability to review the ferry terminal and any adjustments that can be made to improve access.	The Consumer Council conducted a site visit along with participants with a disability. Feedback was gathered and a report on

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		Special Assistance Service Provision was submitted to Stena Line with recommendations for improvements.
Arrangements for staff with a disability.	The Consumer Council is an equal opportunities employer, dedicated to the promotion of equality in all aspects of working life. Full and fair consideration is given to applications for employment made by disabled persons, having regard to their particular aptitudes and abilities. Reasonable adjustments for disabled job applicants are made on request.	Arrangements were made for staff who acquired a disability in 2017-18. The Occupational Health Service was used to advise on arrangements to support their return to work to ensure that they were able to continue to perform effectively.
Consumer Insight Survey- annual survey of a demographically representative sample of NI consumers to explore key consumer concerns and issues.	Evaluation of various groups of consumers to inform the board and Consumer Council policies on various types of consumers.	The annual survey took place in February 2018. It was conducted online by YouGov and used a sample of NI consumers in various equality groups. The results were analysed and individual reports published on various sub groups of consumers.
Recruitment of staff for The consumer Council.	The candidate information sheet for all roles states that employees must contribute to the Consumer Council's equality scheme.	This was achieved as all candidate booklets contained this requirement in relation to job roles at The consumer Council.
Student guide provision for all students at Belfast Met College.	To provide a student guide for all students with specific delivery of information to students with a disability.	The Consumer Council provided a copy of the student guide for all students at the college and delivered 9 separate presentations specifically for groups of students with a disability.
Review of customer care register for water services.	An online survey was conducted to gain feedback on access to the customer care register for water supply. The register allows people with a disability to get quicker access to information if there is a problem with water supply and emergency supplies if needed.	The survey was conducted and results used to give recommendations to NI Water in relation to feedback on the needs of consumers with a greater need for extra care.
Provision of a real time translator to help consumers with lodging complaints.	The Consumer Council enlisted the help of The Big Word, a company providing real time translation services for	The translation service was advertised and used by consumers.

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	consumers whose first language is not English.	
Provide a range of presentations to improve awareness of consumer law, rights and responsibilities.	To improve consumers' awareness of consumer issues.	The Consumer Council delivered a range of workshops and presentations for various consumer groups. These included older people, working age adults at their workplace, those on a low income, womens' groups, mens' groups, other ethnic origins, students and young people, community groups (comprising one religion) disabled people and faith/church based groups.
Continue to ensure The Consumer Council building is accessible to all consumers.	Provide a Loop hearing system for consumers with hearing impairment, ensure there is disabled access to meeting rooms and a toilet.	The building has been checked and continues to provide access to consumers with a physical disability and those who have a hearing impairment.

3 Has the **application of the Equality Scheme** commitments resulted in any **changes** to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2017-18 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No (go to Q.4) Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

The changes apply to policy, practice, procedures, and service delivery of bodies that the Consumer Council monitors rather than our own.

3a With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what **difference was made, or will be made, for individuals**, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples:

3b What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? (*tick all that apply*)

As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy (*please give details*):

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- As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

- As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

- As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

- Other *(please specify and give details):*

Section 2: Progress on Equality Scheme commitments and action plans/measures

Arrangements for assessing compliance (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 2)

- 4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2017-18 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*
- Yes, organisation wide
 - Yes, some departments/jobs
 - No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
 - No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
 - Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Given our statutory role to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland, particularly vulnerable consumers, equality duties are mainstreamed in the work undertaken by most Consumer Council staff. However, Section 75 is not explicitly referenced.

- 5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2017-18 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

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- Yes, organisation wide
- Yes, some departments/jobs
- No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment
- No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

As Q4 above.

6 In the 2017-18 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

- Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan
- Yes, through organisation wide annual business planning
- Yes, in some departments/jobs
- No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan
- No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2013-14 report
- Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

The Corporate Plan for 2016-21, and annual business plans to implement this, include Equality Plans.

They state that The Consumer Council in its work will have regard to the interests of consumers who are disabled or chronically sick, of pensionable age, with low incomes, or reside in rural areas.

Equality action plans/measures

7 Within the 2017-18 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:	0	Actions ongoing:	0	Actions to commence:	0
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Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

The ongoing equality actions included in the Business Plan for 2017-18 are:

- Providing additional support to vulnerable consumers in handling energy, postal, transport and water complaints as set out in the relevant legislation;
- Representing the views of consumers in respect of changes and implementation of policy on key consumer issues, and in regulated markets, in line with the Consumer Council’s statutory remit; and
- Ensuring that consumers benefit from a sustainable post office network where they can access products and services that meet their needs through the Network Transformation Programme.
- An equality action plan is currently being developed alongside the revision of the Equality Scheme (January 2019). A more detailed report on action measures will therefore be submitted within the next reporting period.

8 Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2017-18 reporting period (*points not identified in an appended plan*):

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2017-18 reporting period, the following have been identified: (*tick all that apply*)

- Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality
- Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way
- Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities
- Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

Arrangements for consulting (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

- All the time Sometimes Never

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2017-18 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

- Active involvement of disabled people in conducting site visits for Translink services, ferry ports and City of Derry Airport.
- The annual Consumer Insight Survey was conducted with a demographically representative sample of NI consumers to gain insight into their key consumer issues and concerns.

12 In the 2017-18 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used by consultees**: *(tick all that apply)*

- Face to face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation
- Internet discussions
- Telephone consultations
- Other *(please specify)*: Quantitative annual survey

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

The Consumer Council consulted on its draft Forward Work Programme for 2017-18, we used a variety of means to do this:

- Face to Face discussions;
- Public Consultation Event;
- Online – The Consumer Council website including contact details for a specific member of staff;

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- Social media- facebook and twitter
- Online Survey Monkey; and
- Formal Consultation response.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2017-18 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2017-18 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes No Not applicable – no commitment to review

Arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year *(as recorded in screening reports)*:

0

In terms of our governance and employment policies, these are those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and therefore subject to screening and equality impact assessment by the NICS. The Consumer Council uses policies and procedures drawn up by HR Connect.

In light of the above, no strategies or policies required screening or equality impact assessment by the Consumer Council during the last year.

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2017-18:

0
0

Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.

Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment (EQIA)** presented.

0

Consultations for an **EQIA** alone.

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Not applicable.

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No concerns were raised No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for publishing the results of assessments (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2017-18 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Arrangements for monitoring and publishing the results of monitoring (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2017-18 reporting period? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No, already taken place
 No, scheduled to take place at a later date Not applicable

Please provide any details:

- 21** In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? (*tick one box only*)

Yes No ✓ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

- 22** Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2015-16 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

See Q21 above

- 23** Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

See Q21 above

Staff Training (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 5)

24

Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2017-18, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

In February 2018, all staff received training from the Now Project on the JAM card initiative. The JAM Card allows people with a learning difficulty, autism or communication barrier tell others they need 'Just A Minute' discreetly and easily.

- 25** Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

The above workshop helped staff recognise communications issues that any consumer may have and how to deal with these in a helpful way.

Public Access to Information and Services (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 6)

- 26 Please list **any examples** of where monitoring during 2017-18, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation **to access to information and services**:

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

- 27 How many complaints **in relation to the Equality Scheme** have been received during 2017-18?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

- 28 Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

February 2019

- 29 Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

Key priorities will be reviewing the Consumer Council's Equality Scheme and, following a restructuring exercise and reallocation of duties, training for relevant staff on S75.

- 30 In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what **equality and good relations priorities** are anticipated over the next (2017-18) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

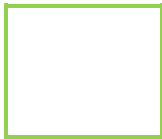
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- Employment
- Goods, facilities and services
- Legislative changes
- Organisational changes/ new functions
- Nothing specific, more of the same
- Other (please state):

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

A new Disability Action Plan is in the process of being developed and a more detailed report will be submitted on the plan in the next reporting period. Therefore, Part B has not been filled out in full.

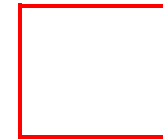
1. Number of action measures for this **reporting period** that have been:



Fully achieved



Partially achieved



Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on all actions that have been fully achieved in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ⁱ	Outcomes / Impact ⁱⁱ

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Regional ⁱⁱⁱ	Not applicable		
Local ^{iv}	Not applicable		

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	JAM card training to help consumers with communication barriers	JAM card training received and used when working with consumers who are impacted.	All Consumer Council staff trained to recognise and deal with communications issues.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period? **None**

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact

PART B

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	See 2(a) above in respect of the public appointments process.		

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above: **None**

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows: **None**

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestonesv / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved

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4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

The Consumer Council uses focus groups of consumers to explore key policy issues.

(b) Quantitative

Complaints handling database

Consumer Outlook Index – an omnibus survey conducted every six months.

Other research commissioned to explore key policy issues.

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6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

Not applicable as such, but The Consumer Council reviews its equality plan each year to address key emerging issues that have been highlighted by research or from our stakeholders.

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation’s annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

Yes, see Q6 above.

ⁱ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

ⁱⁱ **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

^{iv} **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.

^v **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.