



Department for the

Economy

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An Roinn

Geilleagair

Equality Screening Template – Section 75 of Northern Ireland Act 1998

Please complete the coversheet details below:

Policy title: Electricity Smart Meter Roll-out Design Plan

Decision:

Policy screened out **with** mitigation

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Date of completion: 12th August 2024 (amended 4th December 2024)

Content

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

Part 1. Policy scoping

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

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

Information about the policy

Name of the policy: Smart Electricity Meter Roll-out Design Plan

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy: New policy

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

A Design Plan for the roll-out of smart electricity meters will cover the roles and responsibilities, which organisations will have ownership of procurement, deployment, data management systems, consumer protection, consumer education, and how consumers will pay for smart metering systems and the timeline.

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

We expect that the deployment of Smart Electricity Meters will support delivery of the Executive's Energy Strategy¹ by aiding the transition to a greener, more reliable energy system, delivering benefits for all Section 75 categories.

¹ [The Path to Net Zero Energy. Safe. Affordable. Clean. \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/the-path-to-net-zero-energy-safe-affordable-clean/)

Smart meters will put consumers in control of their electricity consumption. This gives them the power to adopt energy efficiency measures which in turn could reduce their electricity bills, a benefit that can be realised by all Section 75 categories.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The DfE developed the Energy Strategy which the NI Executive considered and adopted. DfE then developed the Action Plan for delivery of the Energy Strategy. Action 12 on the Energy Strategy Action Plan 2024² is to publish a high-level design plan for the implementation of Smart Meters. The Department initiated the development of a design plan. It partnered with consultants to produce a lessons learned report on smart electricity meter roll-outs in other UK jurisdictions and in Europe. The Department developed the Smart Meters Design Plan in close consultation with the Utility Regulator.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

DfE is responsible for delivery of the Energy Strategy and the related Action Plans.

Implementation factors

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

If yes, are they (please delete as appropriate)

Financial – Existing electricity meters are financed by consumers via a regulated price control. DfE proposes that smart meters are financed using the same method. The networks company will provide a full business case for new meters to the Utility Regulator for approval.

Legislative – The Department may consider taking powers to instruct the Utility Regulator to require industry to deploy smart meters.

Main stakeholders affected

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

² [Energy Strategy - Path to Net Zero Energy - 2024 Action Plan Report \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://economy-ni.gov.uk/energy-strategy-path-to-net-zero-energy-2024-action-plan-report)

- Electricity consumers in Northern Ireland
- Utility Regulator
- Consumer Council of Northern Ireland
- Electricity networks (SONI/NIE Networks)
- Electricity suppliers
- Energy supply chain sector

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

The Smart Metering design plan is a key enabler policy required to deliver on various aspects of the NI Executive's Energy Strategy. Therefore, this design plan has been drafted to reflect the objectives of the Energy Strategy.

Available evidence

Much of the evidence available to the Department on the effects of energy policy on different categories of people comes from the responses to the Department's recent consultations and calls for evidence on the Executive's Energy Strategy which the Department developed. The first stage of the strategy development was a Call for Evidence published in December 2019. This process also involved thematic workshops, stakeholder engagement and collaboration across government. A report on the Call for Evidence, along with all the individual responses was published on 30 June 2020. Throughout the policy process the Department worked collaboratively with over 70 organisations represented on five working groups, established specific industry consultation groups, issued a monthly e-bulletin to over 600 stakeholders and established a cross governmental stakeholder group to align cross cutting policies.

The second stage was the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation Paper, launched on 31 March and closed on 02 July 2021. The Department carried out virtual, public stakeholder events as well as consumer focus groups and an online business survey. This commitment to collaboration is reflected in the high level of responses (283) to the policy options consultation, resulting in stakeholders' feedback and views on policy proposals being reflected in Northern Ireland's new Energy Strategy.

A Cost Benefit Analysis for the introduction of smart meters was published by DfE in 2023.³ It confirmed smart meters to be of an overall positive benefit for consumers. A range of quantified benefits for consumers were identified during the analysis. The key benefit for all consumers was better customer service stemming from the availability of real-time data which allows consumers to better understand and control their electricity usage and also take advantage of more suitable tariffs in order to reduce bills.

In developing the proposed consultation document on smart metering, the Department worked closely with the stakeholders most likely to be significantly affected: the Utility Regulator, Northern Ireland Electricity Networks and the Consumer Council. Each of these organisations will have significant roles in the delivery of the policy. They will focus on consumer protection and meet the needs of Section 75 in a range of ways. They will design a consumer communications approach and campaign and will propose core messaging and an engagement strategy, ensuring the consumer voice is at the heart of all

³ [Smart meters cost/benefit analysis report | Department for the Economy](#)

elements of the roll-out. For clarity, it is intended that a sub-group will be set up to consider all aspects of consumer protection for the smart meter roll-out. As part of this, we expect that consumer representatives will have a role to play in the design of the requirements for the new systems. Therefore, the needs of the Section 75 groups will be explored and addressed.

The Department Commissioned LCP Delta to undertake a lessons learned review of smart meter implementation in other markets. It carried out a literature review and a range of stakeholder workshops. A diverse range of participants from Northern Ireland, Ireland and Britain, including government, electricity suppliers, network operators and consumer organisations were represented. The report is available on the DfE website.⁴ There is a specific chapter on Consumer Protection which covers providing accessible support to all consumers, having specific protections – particularly for vulnerable consumers to prevent self-disconnection. It also recommends that the installation process is a unique opportunity to identify vulnerable consumers and provide additional support so they are not disadvantaged.

Additionally, the Utility Regulator commissioned LCP Delta to carry out research into the lessons learned from other roll-outs, with a focus on the experience of consumers. The study found that different consumer types will have different barriers to engaging with the smart meter roll-out and the support needed by these consumers will vary. Mapping the vulnerable consumer groups and their key barriers will support a tailored approach to engagement that will allow all groups to engage with and benefit from smart metering. The report is available on the Utility Regulator's website.⁵

Religious belief evidence/information:

The 2021 Census⁶ found that 30.4% of the population in Northern Ireland came from a Protestant background and 42.3% from a Catholic background. The Equality Commission's Fair Employment Monitoring Report No. 32⁷ indicates that 50% of the (monitored) workforce are from a Protestant background and 50% from a Roman Catholic background. No responses to the public consultation on the Executive's Energy Strategy identified religious belief as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

⁴ [Design plan for the roll-out of smart electricity meters | Department for the Economy](#)

⁵ [Publication of Electricity Smart Metering Consumer Impact Research Report | Utility Regulator](#)

⁶ [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Religion \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [ECNI - Fair Employment Monitoring Report 32 \(2021\) \(equalityni.org\)](#)

Political Opinion evidence / information:

In 2023, 30% of respondents to a NI Life & Times Survey⁸ considered themselves to be unionist, 28% nationalist and 37% neither. No responses to the public consultation on the Executive's Energy Strategy identified political opinion as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

Racial Group evidence / information:

The 2021 Census⁹ reported that 96.6% of the total NI population was white. No responses in the consultation on the Executive's Energy Strategy identified racial grouping as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

Age evidence / information:

The Northern Ireland population continues to age. The 2021 Census¹⁰ shows: • 0-14 years 19.20% • 15-39 31.2% • 40-64 32.40% • 65+ 17.2% No responses in the consultation on the Executive's Energy Strategy identified age as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed transposition.

Marital Status evidence / information:

The 2011 Census¹¹ contains information in relation to the marital and civil partnership status of the population within Northern Ireland. 45.6% of the population are married, 38.1% are single. A large number of stakeholders participated in the evidence gathering aspect of the Energy Strategy but information on individuals was not collected based on marital status and no responses identified marital as a factor in differing effects of the strategy or specific policies such as the support scheme policy. No information on individuals' marital status was collected in responses to the Executive's Energy Strategy, but no responses identified it as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters

⁸ [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: 2023 \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://www.ark.ac.uk/ni-life-times-survey-2023/)

⁹ [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Ethnic group \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin-ethnic-group)

¹⁰ [Census 2021 population and household estimates for Northern Ireland: Statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census-2021-population-and-household-estimates-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin)

¹¹ [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Marital or civil partnership status & Household relationships \(couples\) Version 2 \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin-marital-or-civil-partnership-status-household-relationships-couples-version-2)

Design Plan, and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

Sexual Orientation evidence / information:

A 2021 census¹² reported that 90.0% of people aged 16 and over in Northern Ireland identify as heterosexual, 2.1% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other sexual orientation. A large number of stakeholders participated in the evidence gathering aspect of the Energy Strategy but information on individuals was not collected based on sexual orientation. No information on individuals' sexual orientation was collected in responses to the Executive's Energy Strategy, but no responses identified it as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan, and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

Men & Women generally evidence / information:

NISRA population statistics for 2020 show that 50.7% are female with 49.3% male¹³ By 2031, projections are that the male/female balance will be 50/50 with that balance persisting to 2051.

The NISRA Labour Force Survey¹⁴ states that in 2023, of those aged 16-64 who were employed, 52% (445,000) were male compared to 48% of women (418,000). There are differences between the public and private sector.

DAERA leads on the Just Transition within the Green Growth Strategy. QUB has published an independent think piece on "Mapping a Just Transition"¹⁵ for Northern Ireland. This was grant funded by DfE.

A large number of stakeholders participated in the evidence gathering aspect of the Energy Strategy policy options consultation. No information on individuals' gender was collected in responses to the Executive's Energy Strategy, but no responses identified it as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan, and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

¹² [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Sexual orientation \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/bulletins/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin-sexual-orientation)

¹³ [Census 2021 population and household estimates for Northern Ireland: Statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/bulletins/census-2021-population-and-household-estimates-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin)

¹⁴ [Labour Force Survey Annual Summary Report 2023 \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/bulletins/labour-force-survey-annual-summary-report-2023)

¹⁵ [Media,1174634,smxs.pdf \(qub.ac.uk\)](https://www.qub.ac.uk/media/1174634/smxs.pdf)

Disability evidence / information:

A NISRA 2021 report¹⁶ states that 24.3% of the adult NI population are disabled.

One of eight consumer focus groups conducted during the Path to Net Zero options consultation phase comprised people with disabilities. There were no discernible differences reported between the views expressed by people with disabilities or long-term illness and other focus group participants.

No information on individuals' disability status was collected in responses to the Executive's Energy Strategy; however no responses identified it as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies, such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan. The Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan.

DfE and the energy industry will work in partnership with consumer representatives to develop smart metering system functional requirements with the needs of people with disabilities in mind.

Dependants evidence / information:

A large number of stakeholders participated in the evidence gathering aspect of the Path to Net Zero energy strategy options consultation phase.

No information on individuals' dependants status was collected in responses to the Executive's Energy Strategy, but no responses identified it as a factor in differing effects of the Energy Strategy or specific energy policies such as the proposed Smart Meters Design Plan, and the Department has no evidence to suggest that it should influence the effects of the proposed plan

¹⁶ [Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Health \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-statistical-bulletin-health)

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 of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious belief

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design plan provisions will apply to everyone regardless of their religious belief.

Political Opinion

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their political opinion.

Racial Group

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their racial group.

Age

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their age.

Marital status

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs,

experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their marital status.

Sexual orientation

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their sexual orientation.

Men and Women Generally

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of they are men or women.

Disability

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of their disability status. DfE and the energy industry will consider whether there is a need to explore alternative solutions for people with disabilities.

Dependants

No differential effect has been identified in respect of energy policy in the responses to the Call for Evidence or the Energy Strategy Policy Options Consultation. The Department does not anticipate any difference in needs, experience, or priorities. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals will apply to everyone regardless of whether or not they have dependants.

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 Screening Questions 1-4, which follow.

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?

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals may have different effect on this category. For example people with visual impairment may have issues accessing a mobile app or in-home display. The Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation.

DfE and the energy industry will work in partnership with consumer representatives to develop smart metering system functional requirements with the needs of people with disabilities in mind. For example, accessible apps and in-home displays.

DfE and the energy industry will consider whether there is a need to explore alternative solutions for people with disabilities.

What is the level of impact? Minor possible negative impact.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are not likely to have any specific or different effect on this category. However, the Department will monitor responses to the Smart Meters Design Plan consultation for any suggested differential effect.

What is the level of impact? None

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories? Yes/No

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Political Opinion –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Racial Group –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Age –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Marital Status –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Sexual Orientation –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Men and Women generally –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Disability –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

Dependants –

No. The Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on the equality of opportunity for people of their background or circumstances.

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on good relations between groups in this category.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on good relations between groups in this category.

What is the level of impact? None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on good relations between groups in this category.

What is the level of impact? None

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

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief –

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on promoting good relations between groups in this category.

Political Opinion –

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on promoting good relations between groups in this category.

Racial Group –

The Department considers that the Smart Meters Design Plan proposals are likely to have no direct effect on promoting good relations between groups in this category.

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).

We have identified that this policy may have a minor negative impact on people with a disability. For example people with visual impairment may have issues accessing a mobile app or in-home display. We feel the measures we propose to mitigate this risk for example, accessible apps and in-home displays, are sufficient to negate any negative impact.

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

Policy screened out with mitigation.

We expect that the development of a robust and high quality Smart Meters Design Plan will benefit all of the population in Northern Ireland relatively equally, including all Section 75 categories. Through a move to cleaner sources of electricity, carbon emissions will be reduced along with energy costs, helping to tackle fuel poverty as well as reducing associated health problems.

Developing a robust Smart Meters Design Plan will accelerate Northern Ireland's journey towards net zero, facilitating a more flexible, robust and cost-effective electricity network and enabling more renewable electricity to be accepted onto the Northern Ireland electricity network.

The costs of the smart metering programme should be transparent to ensure the trust of consumers. Costs should be apportioned and allocated based on those who can benefit, and smart metering should enable all consumers, including the vulnerable, to participate and benefit.

We have identified that this policy may have a minor impact on people with a disability e.g. people with visual impairment. We feel the measures we propose (e.g. an accessible app/in-home display) to mitigate this risk are sufficient to negate any negative impact.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced - please provide details.

The Department is committed to considering the needs of all via the Design Plan. We recognise that smart metering systems should be developed in a way that takes account of the requirements of people with disabilities. DfE and the energy industry will work with consumer representatives to identify and address any specific requirements during the process of developing smart metering system functional requirements. We will give consideration to exploring alternative solutions for people with disabilities.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

Not applicable

Part 4. Monitoring

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

The Department intends to consult on the Smart Meters Design Plan and any information gathered during the consultation which indicates a negative impact upon any of the nine S75 categories will be used to inform the final policy.

If any negative impacts are identified the Department will seek to mitigate for these and if required re-screen the final policy. Once introduced, monitoring of the Smart Meters Design Plan will be via existing and ongoing monitoring of fuel poverty and other social effects of energy costs on NI consumers. Such reports are conducted by the NI Housing Executive, UK Government, CCNI and National Energy Action. The Department will review changes in fuel poverty data to assess whether the Smart Meters Design Plan is contributing to changes in NI fuel poverty.

The effects of the Smart Meters Design Plan will apply equally across all electricity consumers in NI. The Department's screening has not identified any areas of high likely impact on equality of opportunity, due in part to the effectively universal access to electricity, the common usages for electricity across all equality groups, and the uniform pricing of electricity across NI. The Department's primary monitoring will be in relation to fuel poverty statistics in NI. This is because increases or decreases in the cost of energy are likely to affect those in (or close to) fuel poverty disproportionately because they have less discretionary income with which to meet increases, and, conversely, decreases in energy costs will free up proportionately more income for them given the high proportion of their disposable income which is spent on energy.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	Maeve Holly
Position/Job Title:	Deputy Principal
Business Area/ Branch:	Wholesale Electricity and Networks Team
Date:	4 th December 2024

Approved by:	Linzi Hyvart
Position/Job Title:	Head of Wholesale Electricity and Networks
Business Area/Branch:	Wholesale Electricity and Networks
Date:	4 th December 2024