



Department for  
**Communities**

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**Commonities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

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# Budget 2025 - 26

## Equality Impact Assessment

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Communities Budget 2025-26 consultation is published in a situation where the Executive's financial position remains challenging for all departments.
- 1.2 The 2025-26 Budget agreed by the Executive on 3 April 2025 prioritises the Programme for Government priorities and sets out a direction of travel which shows the Executive is prepared to do things differently, including using its limited resources to do what matters most.
- 1.3 The Department's initial 2025-26 Budget allocations aim to support delivery of the Department's 2025-26 strategic objectives and Minister's priorities, including Programme for Government priorities. Within the Department's constrained financial envelope, the Department's initial budget allocations aim to support delivery on statutory obligations, contractual commitments and in other areas of Resource and Capital discretionary spend, and to maximise best use of the Department's limited financial resources. The Department's initial Budget allocations align with and informs the Department's 2025-26 Business Plan.

## Executive's 2025-26 Budget

- 1.4 The Executive agreed the **Draft 2025-26 Budget** on 19 December 2024. Following agreement of the Draft Budget, the Department of Finance undertook a 12-week public consultation period on the proposed budget allocations, in advance of the 2025-26 financial year. The public consultation closed on 13 March 2025, with responses collated and analysed to inform the Executive's final decisions on departmental allocations.
- 1.5 The Final 2025-26 Budget was agreed by the Executive on 3 April 2025. As outlined by the **Finance Minister, John O'Dowd MLA**, the 'Budget reflects our Programme for Government commitment to 'Doing What Matters Most' and shows this Executive's determination to work together to deliver. It provides funding to 'cut waiting lists, deliver affordable childcare, support Special Educational Needs, invest in skills, make our communities safer, funds actions towards ending violence against women and girls, provide more social housing, protect Lough Neagh and for public sector Transformation'.

## Department for Communities 2025-26 Budget

- 1.6 The Executive's Final 2025-26 Budget provides the Department for Communities (hereinafter referred to as 'the Department') with an allocation of £938.1m Resource DEL funding, £270m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital for 2025-26. Additionally, a further indicative Resource allocation of £2.8m for Employers National Insurance Contributions was agreed by the Executive and will be provided through the 2025-26 Monitoring Round process.
- 1.7 As a result, **the Department's total Budget proposed for allocation comprises £940.9m Resource DEL (including £184.1m of Executive Earmarked and £756.8m of Non-Ring-Fenced Resource funding), £270m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital for 2025-26.**

### Earmarked Resource

- 1.8 The outcome on the Department's Earmarked allocation is positive. Except for a £1.8m bid for the Building Safety Scheme, which was funded within the Department's Non-Ring-Fenced Resource DEL allocation, **the Department's Earmarked requirements in 2025-26 were met in full.**
- 1.9 Additionally, the Department bid for £16.9m of Non-Ring-Fenced funding for Benefit Delivery staffing and to support Universal Credit delivery including

employment support to people in NI. This **£16.9m Benefit Delivery requirement was also met in full**, although as an Earmarked allocation for 2025-26. In total, this provides the Department with Earmarked Resource funding of £184.1m in 2025-26.

### Non-Ring-Fenced Resource DEL

- 1.10 Regarding Non-Ring-Fenced Resource, adjusting for the Benefit Delivery bid received as Earmarked and the reclassification of the Building Safety Scheme, the Department submitted bids totalling £160.6m. The Department notified the Department of Finance of a further £12.2m requirement following the proposed 2024 and 2025 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pay Awards notified in January 2025.
- 1.11 As outlined, the Department received a total Non-Ring-Fenced Resource allocation of £756.8m in the Final 2025-26 Budget, this includes an additional £19.2m General Allocation for 2025-26 which is now proposed for allocation by the Minister. Against the Department's 2025-26 Non-Ring-Fenced Resource allocation of £756.8m, the Department faces a shortfall of £98.6m (12.0%) against a total forecast requirement of £855.4m. Despite this challenging position, it is acknowledged that all Executive departments face similar budget constraints and the additional £19.2m General Allocation provided by the Executive for 2025-26 is welcomed. This includes an £8m allocation provided in the draft 2025-

26 Budget on 19 December 2024, a further £8.4m allocation provided in the Final 2025-26 Budget on 3 April 2025 and a further indicative allocation of £2.8m proposed for Employer's National Insurance Contributions which will be provided through the 2025-26 Monitoring process.

1.12 Regarding Capital, the Department received an allocation of £270m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital. The Department's Capital DEL allocation of £270m results in a £161.3m (38%) shortfall on the Department's Capital DEL bids submitted for 2025-26. The Department's Financial Transactions Capital requirements of £48.1m were met in full.

1.13 Like other departments, the Department's 2025-26 Budget position is challenging. Despite this, critical consideration has been given to the allocation of the Department's Budget in the best way to maximise and support public service delivery.

1.14 The purpose of this Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to present the initial decisions taken by the Minister for Communities in respect of 2025-26 Budget allocations and to outline the potential impact to people in Section 75 categories of those decisions on the services and supports the Department provides.

1.15 It should be noted that the Department's Budget process including policy setting, monitoring of the Budget and the impact of allocations is a continuous and reflective cyclical process. Each financial year, the Department undertakes regular monitoring of its Budget policy decisions. As part of the Budget 2025-26 process, monitoring data from previous Budget cycles has informed budget bids submitted to the Department of Finance for consideration by the Executive, to mitigate adverse or disproportionate impacts identified on people in Section 75 categories.

1.16 Your comment and feedback on the Minister's initial 2025-26 Budget decisions taken and impacts of those decisions is sought through this consultation. The consultation activities will inform decision-making, and every response received by the deadline will be considered. The information provided will also be used to inform development of the Department's 5-Year Plan.

## 2. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

2.1 Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 requires the Department, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between -

- people with different religious beliefs;
- people from different racial groups;
- people of different ages;
- people with different marital status;
- people with different sexual orientations;
- men and women generally;
- people with or without a disability;
- people with or without dependants; and
- people with different political opinions.

2.2 In addition, but without prejudice to the duty above, the Department should also have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people with different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups.

2.3 The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006, which came into effect on 1 January 2007, introduced new duties requiring all public authorities in carrying out their functions having due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

2.4 Equality scheme commitments require public authorities to determine if there are any impacts on equality of opportunity and if there are opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity between people within the Section 75 equality categories. Where screening would not be an adequate means of gathering the information that is needed to assess the relevant equality impacts or opportunities, the public authority should proceed to do an EQIA. In response to this, the Department has determined that the Departmental allocation, as outlined in the Budget 2025-26, requires an EQIA.

2.5 The Department has also carried out a Rural Needs Impact Assessment on the proposed Budget 2025-26 allocation decisions. This can be viewed on the **Department's website**.

- 2.6 This document is the prepared draft EQIA. The purpose of this document is to record the findings of the EQIA and invite comments.
- 2.7 Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign language summary versions of this draft EQIA will also be published on the Department's website.
- 2.8 To request an alternative format please contact:
- Financial Management Directorate  
Department for Communities  
Level 5, Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
BELFAST  
BT2 7EG  
Telephone: **028 90512 625**  
**Email: [DFCBUDGETEQIA@COMMUNITIES-NI.GOV.UK](mailto:DFCBUDGETEQIA@COMMUNITIES-NI.GOV.UK)**

## 3. Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 The process of setting Budgets can in some cases have an unintentionally greater impact on some specific Section 75 groups than others, for example, on males, females, young people or pensioners. In allocating Budgets, the Department aims to avoid any adverse impacts and where possible, action will be taken to mitigate against specific adverse impacts and to consider alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 3.2 To comply with its Section 75 obligations, the Department has carried out a draft EQIA on the Budget 2025-26 allocation to the Department.
- 3.3 The primary function of an EQIA is to assess whether policy proposals would have a differential impact and in particular, an adverse differential impact on the categories of persons listed in Section 75, and any sub-groups within those categories.
- 3.4 When conducting an EQIA, the Department acts in accordance with the guidance published by the Equality Commission in February 2005<sup>1</sup> which recommends that there should be seven steps in the EQIA process:
- Step 1 Defining the aims of the policy.
- Step 2 Consideration of available data and research.
- Step 3 Assessment of impacts.
- Step 4 Consideration of measures which may mitigate any adverse impact and alternative policies which may better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- Step 5 Formal consultation.
- Step 6 Decision and publication of the EQIA results.
- Step 7 Monitoring for adverse impact.
- 3.5 In response to this, the Department has critically examined the proposed 2025-26 Budget allocations and, given the constrained Budget position with potential for impacts on Section 75 groups, has prepared a draft EQIA. This has been launched for consultation to collate views from interested stakeholders. This document is the draft of the EQIA prior to incorporating the outcomes of the consultation.
- 3.6 This document includes information on how the publication of the results of the EQIA will be handled.

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1 Practical guidance on equality impact assessment - <https://www.equalityni.org/Publications/Employers-Service-Providers/Public-Authorities/Practical-guidance-on-equality-impact-assessment?ID=1117>



## 4. Policy Aim

### Budget 2025-26

- 4.1 To inform the Executive's setting of Budget 2025-26, in addition to funding requirements, equality information was provided by all departments on the potential equality impacts of living within Resource DEL Baselines, and the impact of Resource and zero-based Capital DEL bids not being met. The Executive considered the potential equality impacts before agreeing the Draft 2025-26 Budget on 19 December 2024.
- 4.2 Following agreement of the **Draft Budget**, the Department of Finance undertook a 12-week public consultation period on the proposed budget allocations, in advance of the incoming 2025-26 financial year. The public **consultation** closed on 13 March 2025, with responses collated and analysed, to inform the Executive's final decisions on departmental allocations.
- 4.3 The Final 2025-26 Budget was agreed by the Executive on 3 April 2025. As outlined by the **Finance Minister, John O'Dowd MLA**, the 2025-26 'Budget reflects our Programme for Government commitment to 'Doing What Matters Most' and shows this Executive's determination to work together to deliver. It provides funding 'to cut waiting lists, deliver affordable childcare, support Special Educational Needs, invest in skills, make our communities safer, funds actions towards ending violence against women and girls, provide more social housing, protect Lough Neagh and for public sector Transformation'.
- 4.4 The Executive's Final 2025-26 Budget for Northern Ireland provides the Resource DEL and Capital funding allocations to departments for the 2025-26 financial year.
- 4.5 Departments are required to consider, and equality impact their funding allocations in line with Equality guidance. Any equality impacts aligned with the final 2025-26 Budget position, will be provided to the Executive to consider, including supporting any in-year adjustments needed to departmental allocations.
- 4.6 The purpose of this paper is to set out the Department's initial assessment of the equality impacts of the Budget on spending proposals for the 2025-26 financial year.
- 4.7 It is important to note that the Department's Budget 2025-26 allocations will provide funding for the Department's programmes, Arm's Length Bodies, administrative costs and capital investment, but do not cover social security benefit and pension payments to customers which are funded directly by Treasury or by HMRC National Insurance Contributions.

## Department for Communities

4.8 The Department provides support to meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged people, families and communities across Northern Ireland.

4.9 The Department delivers a diverse range of functions that impact on the lives of everyone in our society. The Department's common purpose is to make this a great place to live for everybody by supporting people, building communities, shaping places. Areas of responsibility include:

- delivery of the social security system including child maintenance and pensions;
- providing advice and support for those seeking employment and for those who are unable to work;
- ensuring the availability of good quality and affordable housing;
- encouraging diversity and participation in society and promoting social inclusion;
- promoting sports and leisure within our communities;
- supporting local government to deliver services;
- supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- delivering Neighbourhood Renewal and tackling disadvantage in the most deprived areas;
- identifying and preserving records of historical, social and cultural importance to ensure

they are available to the public and for future generations;

- realising the value of our built heritage;
- supporting creative industries, and promoting the arts, language and cultural sectors;
- providing free access to books, information, IT and community programmes through our libraries;
- maintaining museums;
- revitalising town and city centres; and
- delivery of an Appeals Service

4.10 The funding allocated to the Department includes funding to support the Department's Arm's Length Bodies. These include:

- Armagh Observatory and Planetarium
- Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
- Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC)
- National Museums Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Library Authority (known as Libraries Northern Ireland)
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC)
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

- Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
- Sport NI
- Ulster Supported Employment Limited
- North South Language Bodies
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Ulster-Scots Agency

## 5. Budget 2025-26 Outcome

### Executive's Budget 2025-26

- 5.1 The Executive agreed the Draft 2025-26 Budget on 19 December 2024. Following agreement of the Draft Budget, the Department of Finance undertook a full 12-week public consultation period on the proposed budget allocations, in advance of the incoming 2025-26 financial year. The public consultation closed on 13 March 2025, with responses collated and analysed, to inform the Executive's final decisions on departmental allocations.
- 5.2 The Final 2025-26 Budget was agreed by the Executive on 3 April 2025. As outlined by the Finance Minister, John O'Dowd MLA, the 2025-26 'Budget reflects our Programme for Government commitment to 'Doing What Matters Most' and shows this Executive's determination to work together to deliver. It provides funding 'to cut waiting lists, deliver affordable childcare, support Special Educational Needs, invest in skills, make our communities safer, funds actions towards ending violence against women and girls, provide more social housing, protect Lough Neagh and for public sector Transformation'.
- 5.3 The Executive's Final 2025-26 Budget for Northern Ireland provides the Resource DEL and Capital funding allocations to departments for the 2025-26 financial year.

### Department for Communities 2025-26 Budget

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- 5.5 As a result, **the Department's total Budget proposed for allocation comprises £940.9m Resource DEL (including £184.1m of Executive Earmarked and £756.8m of Non-Ring-Fenced Resource funding), £270m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital for 2025-26.**

### Earmarked Resource

- 5.6 The outcome on the Department's Earmarked allocation is positive. Except for a £1.8m bid for the Building Safety Scheme, which was funded within the Department's Non-Ring-Fenced Resource DEL allocation, **the Department's Earmarked requirements in 2025-26 were met in full.**

- 5.7 The Department's Earmarked allocation includes the funding needed to deliver on Housing Benefit Rates, existing Welfare Mitigations and the De-Rating Grant payments to councils.
- 5.8 Additionally, the Department bid for £16.9m of Non-Ring-Fenced funding for Benefit Delivery staffing and to support Universal Credit delivery including employment support to people in NI. This £16.9m Benefit Delivery requirement was also met in full, although as an Earmarked allocation for 2025-26. In total, this provides the Department with Earmarked Resource funding of £184.1m in 2025-26.

#### **Non-Ring-Fenced Resource DEL**

- 5.9 Regarding Non-Ring-Fenced Resource, adjusting for the Benefit Delivery bid received as Earmarked and the reclassification of the Building Safety Scheme, the Department submitted bids totalling £160.6m. The Department also notified the Department of Finance of a further £12.2m requirement for the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies, following the 2024 and 2025 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pay Awards proposed in January 2025.
- 5.10 As outlined, the Department received a total Non-Ring-Fenced Resource allocation of £756.8m in the Final 2025-26 Budget, this includes an additional £19.2m General Allocation for 2025-26 which is now proposed for allocation by the Minister. Against the Department's 2025-26 Non-Ring-Fenced Resource allocation of £756.8m, the Department's faces a shortfall of

£98.6m (12.0%) against a total forecast requirement of £855.4m. Despite this challenging position, it is acknowledged that all Executive departments face similar budget constraints and as such the additional £19.2m General Allocation provided by the Executive for 2025-26 is welcomed. This includes a £8m allocation provided in the draft 2025-26 Budget on 19 December 2024, a further £8.4m allocation provided in the Final 2025-26 Budget on 3 April 2025 and a further indicative allocation of £2.8m proposed for Employers National Insurance Contributions which will be provided through the 2025-26 Monitoring process.

#### **Capital DEL and Financial Transactions Capital**

- 5.11 Regarding Capital, the Department received an allocation of £270m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital. The Department's Capital DEL allocation of £270m results in a £161.3m (38%) shortfall on the Department's Capital DEL bids submitted for 2025-26. The Department's Financial Transactions Capital requirements of £48.1m were met in full.
- 5.12 Like all departments, the Department's 2025-26 Budget position is challenging. Despite this, critical consideration has been given to the allocation of the Department's Budget in order to maximise and support public service delivery. In managing allocations, the Minister has considered pressures on the Department's Arm's Length Bodies and 3rd party funded

organisations, including the Voluntary and Community sector, and the need to ensure continuity of critical service provision which supports people across all Section 75 groups. This includes allocation of the marginal uplifts in the Department's Resource Budget to mitigate service delivery impacts on Section 75 Groups and utilisation of the Department's Capital allocation to achieve greatest value.

- 5.13 Further detail on the Minister's initial 2025-26 Resource and Capital allocations is provided below.

### **Resource Budget 2025-26**

- 5.14 The Department's 2025-26 Resource funding is intended to cover the administration of Social Security benefits, Pensions and Child Maintenance Service delivery, support social and affordable Housing, Urban Regeneration and Local Government, and provide support for the Voluntary and Community Sector, the sports, arts, language and cultural sectors, our Arm's Length Bodies, the Public Record Office of NI and our built heritage. The Department's Resource budget also includes Earmarked funding for Housing Benefit Rates (£71.4m) administered by the NI Housing Executive on behalf of tenants, De-rating Grant to compensate district councils for de-rating policies (£44.1m) and for continuing of existing Welfare Mitigations (£47.3m) which includes Social Sector Size Criteria (known as Bedroom Tax) and Benefit Cap mitigation.

- 5.15 The Department's Resource Budget of £940.9m in 2025-26, agreed by the Executive, is required to meet statutory, contractual, and other inescapable policy obligations and spend. This includes requirements relating to other statutory and contractual obligations for Councils, Arm's Length Bodies and voluntary bodies.

- 5.16 In allocating the Department's 2025-26 Budget no areas of service delivery are proposed for reduction. The Department's budget will continue to be allocated to support existing statutory and public service delivery and, in line with previous Budget EQIAs, will be used to mitigate any adverse impacts on Section 75 categories.

- 5.17 In light of this position, to ensure continuity of existing statutory and public service delivery, the Department's Resource allocations will reflect the following decisions –

#### **a) Benefit Delivery recruitment progressed**

– The Department will progress critical recruitment related to statutory social security benefit and pensions delivery, including the Move to Universal Credit. This is a positive position for the Department, with the Executive recognising the need for critical benefit delivery funding through the provision of a £16.9m Executive Earmarked allocation for 2025-26. This will provide funding for 400 additional staff in 2025-26, however it is critical this allocation is recurrent in future years.

**b) Voluntary and Community Sector**

**support** – The Minister values the vital role provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector. Given pressures facing the sector including the Real Living Wage, Employers National Insurance Contributions and other inflationary pressures, and similar to the approach taken with Arm's Length Bodies, the Voluntary and Community Sector funding will increase by £2.8m on the Department's 2024-25 funding level.

**c) General Resource Allocation of £3.7m to DfC Arm's Length Bodies**

– The Department's funded Arm's Length Bodies carry out a range of important functions and deliver on the Department's strategic objectives. The Minister acknowledges the vital contributions provided by the Department's Arm's Length Bodies, and despite the constrained financial position facing the Department in 2025-26, all DfC funded Arm's Length Bodies will receive an additional General Allocation in 2025-26, above their 2024-25 funding level. In total this allocation equates to an additional £3.7m for the Department's Arm's Length Bodies, based on 3% for Pay and a pro rata of the £2.8m allocated to the Department for the increase in Employers National Insurance Contributions from April 2025. The Department will continue to work closely with Arm's Length Bodies on monitoring the service impacts arising from the Budget 2025-26 allocations.

**d) Libraries NI and National Museums**

**NI service delivery support** – An additional allocation is proposed for National Museums NI and Libraries NI to support operational stability and continued public accessibility to key cultural and educational institutions. The allocation will help mitigate financial pressures such as inflation, maintain vital public services to the minimum NI Public Library standard and deliver statutory service provision especially when maintaining collections. In the context of the Department's heavily constrained Budget position, whilst the proposed allocation will not fund all pressures faced, this funding will ease service delivery pressures in 2025-26.

**e) Homelessness and Supporting**

**People Programme** – The Minister acknowledges the hugely important role the NI Housing Executive delivers in addressing Homelessness and delivering the Supporting People Programme in NI. The Minister proposes an additional £3.7m above the 2024-25 Budget position, to help bring forward new and extended services which align to the 3 year Supporting People Strategy and aim to prevent homelessness. The proposed Homelessness allocation recognises the need to provide stability of funding for Community Prevention, and investment in Strategic Prevention to allow a focus on working with delivery partners to facilitate the implementation of new initiatives to reduce homeless demands through increased prevention activity.



**f) Employment Support** - Employment is seen as the best route out of poverty and the Minister places significant value on the collaborative and partnership working arrangements in place across departments, with councils and external providers, to provide employment interventions at both at an individual and local level. The Department is currently assessing the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper. In light of this, and to address Northern Ireland's high levels of economic inactivity and the largest disability employment gap in the UK, the Minister is keen to extend the Department's suite of employment support interventions. To support delivery on the necessary employment support interventions, in the absence of securing additional funding in the 2025-26 Budget, in-year funding bids are proposed. Additionally, the Department will also aim to utilise its own limited 2025-26 Budget to support more people, including disabled people and people with health conditions to move closer, find, and progress in work.

**g) Discretionary Support Grants** - Given financial pressures faced by many people, the Minister will maintain the Discretionary Support Grant Budget at £25.5m for 2025-26. This will ensure support is available for eligible people facing financial stress.

**h) Given the scale of financial challenge faced in 2025-26, Resource funding to councils and other funded organisations will predominantly remain at 2024-25 levels.**

Additionally, where bids for additional Executive funding have not been met, the Department is largely unable to increase expenditure in these areas. This includes increasing investment in tackling welfare fraud and error, and further investment in Homelessness Interventions, Supporting People Programme, and in the Culture, Arts, Sport and Heritage sectors.

As outlined, the Department's Resource expenditure is necessary to meet statutory, contractual, and other inescapable policy obligations and spend, and as such there is minimal scope to allocate the Department's 2025-26 Resource Budget differently. The approach taken in 2025-26, like previous years will maximise use of the Department's limited Resource allocation, to avoid any adverse impacts on Section 75 groups.

5.18 Following the decisions outlined at a) to h) above, the Department has been left with a funding gap of £17m to manage in-year, which is the equivalent of the funding required for 425 staff. This position also assumes the Department's Arm's Length Bodies can largely manage within their Resource allocations. Given this challenging funding position, actions will be progressed in-year to minimise the risk of overspend, including;



- Continuing as far as possible to limit all discretionary departmental expenditure;
- Continually review and maintain careful oversight of Resource expenditure, to ensure best use of the limited funds available;
- Submitting bids for in-year Monitoring Rounds and for any other funding available, such as Transformation funding; and
- Considering any further opportunities as they arise to live within budget.

5.19 Throughout 2025-26, the Minister will strive to deliver the best possible outcomes for people and the communities within the Department's available Resource funding envelope.

### **Capital DEL and Financial Transaction Capital 2025-26**

5.20 Regarding Capital, the Department received an allocation of £270.0m Capital DEL and £48.1m Financial Transactions Capital for 2025-26. The Department's Capital DEL allocation of £270.0m results in a £161.3m (38%) shortfall on the Department's Capital DEL bids submitted for 2025-26. The Department's Financial Transactions Capital requirements of £48.1m were met in full.

### **Capital DEL 2025-26**

5.21 The Department's Net Capital allocation is £270.0m, is higher than the opening budget for 2024-25 of £133.4m. Within this, the Department received a specific allocation of £100m for social housing.

However, this falls significantly short by £161.3m (38%) on the Department's Capital DEL bids submitted for 2025-26.

5.22 The Department's Net Capital allocation includes £50.0m of Earmarked funding to support a range of Executive projects/programmes decisions including City and Growth Deals, Complementary Fund and Inclusive Future Funding, Casement Park and The Northern Ireland Football.

5.23 Whilst the 2025-26 Capital allocation will allow the Department to broadly meet its statutory obligations (such as Discretionary Support Loans, Funeral Loans and Health and Safety requirements) and inescapable Capital commitments (such as contractual commitments), the Department is facing a significant shortfall in funding available for other high priority Capital projects.

5.24 Considering the extremely challenging Capital position, after inescapable requirements are met, taking proactive measures to manage the position, only £77.3m of funding is available for Other High Priority Capital Projects. To maximise use of the available Budget, the Department's Capital allocations will reflect the following decisions –

#### **a) £63.0m allocation to New Build**

**Social Homes** – This allocation will allow in the region of 1,000 New Build Social Home starts in 2025-26. It is recognised that this is still significantly short of the target of 2,000 and a bid will be submitted in-year to the Executive to address the shortfall.

- b) £2.5m allocation to Affordable Warmth** to improve energy efficient in the homes or low-income households.
- c) £4.2m allocation to a range of urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal** projects to create town and city centres in which people want to live, shop, work or visit.
- d) £6.7m across a wide range of cultural, heritage and active community projects** to help promote health and wellbeing across all S75 groups such as “Your School, Your Club” community-driven programme.

### **Financial Transaction Capital 2025-26**

5.25 The Department’s Financial Transaction Capital allocation is £48.1m in 2025-26, which is in line with the forecasted need. This will support loans to, or equity investment in, capital projects delivered by the private sector and allow continuation of Co-Ownership affordable housing and the ‘Loan to Acquire Move on Accommodation’ (LAMA) homelessness scheme in 2025-26. In addition, it will provide funding for the Social Capital Loan Scheme for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

## 6. Consideration of Available Data and Research

- 6.1 In assessing the impact of the Budget 2025-26 policy against obligations under Section 75 of the 1998 Act, the Department concludes that there is evidence of impact in respect of some Section 75 categories. Impacts have been considered against the backdrop of available data and the stated policy intent to determine whether differential impacts identified are adverse. Where this is the case, consideration has been given to additional allocations to mitigate any adverse impacts on Section 75 categories.
- 6.2 In compiling the Department Budget 2025-26 Draft EQIA and understanding the adverse impacts on Section 75 Groups, the data considered was derived from, but not limited to, a variety of sources. These include –
- the Labour Force Surveys (NISRA),
  - Northern Ireland Census 2021,
  - Family Resources Survey;
  - the Department for Communities Professional Services Unit,
  - the Department for Communities Integrated Compliment System (ICS) and staffing levels required to delivery welfare benefit and pensions, including the Move to Universal Credit,
  - Department for Work and Pensions,
  - the Chancellor's Spending Review's and Budget announcements,
  - Office of Budget Responsibility publications,
  - University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre Research Data,
  - Jobseeker's Allowance Summary of Statistics,
  - Poverty Bulletin: Northern Ireland, Households Below Average Income Northern Ireland,
  - Database for Income Modelling and Estimation (DIME) dataset,
  - Department's Audit of Inequalities 2021-22<sup>2</sup>,
  - The Department's Annual Fraud and Error results,
  - The Department's Resource and Capital DEL expenditure and outcomes delivered in prior years,
  - The Department's Annual Managed Expenditure (AME) expenditure in prior years and groups supported,
  - Departmental Business Cases documentation,
  - Extensive work carried out by the Department on evidence-based budgeting and prioritisation of funding,

<sup>2</sup> Audit of Inequalities - <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-audit-of-inequalities-2012-2022.pdf>

- Responses to the Department's Budget 2023-24 and 2024-25 EQIAs,
- Response to the Department's Discretionary Support EQIA,
- Section 75 Monitoring data collated on the Department's policy decisions, including returns provided by the Department's funded Arm's Length Bodies, and
- Forecasting of the impact of the 2025-26 Budget on the Department,

its Arm's Length Bodies, funded programmes, sectors and organisations, and the potential availability of funding during 2025-26.

- 6.3 The Department continues to work with its Arm's Length Bodies to understand the impact of the Budget 2025-26 outcome on service delivery, and the potential impacts of the policy on the various Section 75 groups.

## 7. Assessment of Impacts

- 7.1 The Minister is committed to ensuring that the Department fulfils its duties under Section 75 (1) and (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to having due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to desirability of promoting good relations.
- 7.2 An EQIA is necessary given the Department's 2025-26 Budget allocations have potential to impact on the services and supports the Department provides.
- 7.3 This section provides an assessment, using the most recent evidence available, to help:
- Identify those who are likely to be most affected.
  - Assess the likely impact on Section 75 equality groups, examining whether they are likely to have any direct or indirect differential impact on any of these groups.
  - Assess the extent to which the specific needs of section 75 equality groups will be addressed.
- 7.4 In so doing the intention is to ensure that in identifying and taking forward Budget proposals, due regard has been given to the needs and concerns of all Section 75 groups and that the subsequent actions put forward in support of the Budget proposals effectively target the needs of those most vulnerable and at risk.
- 7.5 The proposed policy has been considered and the following assessments made as to whether or not there will be an impact on any of the nine Section 75 categories:
- 7.6 In managing allocations, the Minister has considered pressures on the Department's Arm's Length Bodies and 3rd party funded organisations, including the Voluntary and Community sector, and the need to ensure continuity of critical service provision which supports people across all Section 75 groups. This includes allocation of the marginal uplifts in the Department's 2025-26 Resource Budget to mitigate service delivery impacts on Section 75 Groups and utilisation of the Department's Capital allocation to achieve greatest value. The functions and bodies identified as impacted by the 2025-26 Budget include –
- i Benefit Delivery
  - ii Voluntary & Community Sector
  - iii Arm's Length Bodies
  - iv Supporting People Programme and Homelessness
  - v Employment Support
  - vi Discretionary Support Grants
  - vii Councils & other funded organisations
  - viii New Build Social Housing and Other High Priority Capital
-

## Potential Impact of Proposals

### i Benefit Delivery

Similar to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department's Universal Credit (UC) caseload doubled during the pandemic and continues to remain high. This has left the Department operating with insufficient staffing levels which are impacting on operational delivery areas.

In agreeing the Final 2025 Budget, the Executive allocated an additional £16.9m Earmarked Resource funding for welfare benefit delivery in 2025-26. This funding allocation will allow the Department to progress all critical planned recruitment in 2025-26 related to statutory social security benefit and pensions delivery, including the Move to Universal Credit. This is a positive position for the Department, with the Executive recognising the need for critical benefit delivery funding through the provision of the £16.9m Earmarked allocation for 2025-26. This will

provide funding for 400 additional staff in 2025-26, however it is crucial this allocation is recurrent in future years. Recurrent funding is necessary to appropriately resource benefit delivery including child maintenance and discretionary support services. Failure to have sufficient staffing levels in place would pose a risk of delay in benefit payments, including completion of the Move to Universal Credit, would impact on telephony and service delivery performance, and would place working age customers in financial hardship. In future years, it is also expected that the Department will need additional funding to implement the UK Government's proposed welfare changes.

The Department's assessment of the likely impact of Budget 2025-26 £16.9m additional Earmarked allocation for benefit delivery, upon those within Section 75 categories, identified the following potential impacts:

Groups	Impact
<p>All Groups –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Religious Belief</li> <li>- Political Opinion</li> <li>- Race</li> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Marital Status</li> <li>- Sexual Orientation</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Disability</li> <li>- Dependents</li> </ul>	<p>The Department's benefit delivery and pensions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group.</p> <p>Whilst the Department has a high level of actual vacancies and anticipated vacancies from attrition, the additional £16.9m Earmarked allocation will allow <b>the Department to progress all planned benefit delivery recruitment in 2025-26.</b></p> <p>As a result, <b>no adverse impact is expected on this S75 group.</b></p>

## ii Voluntary & Community Sector

The Minister recognises the vital contribution of the Voluntary and Community sector in representing the interests and values of people and communities and in promoting societal wellbeing and resilience.

Across government we rely on the sector to directly support communities, to advocate for the most vulnerable in society and to contribute to the co-design and co-production of public services.

There is no single database of Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) organisations. Details on 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; [www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)), the Rural Community Network (RCN; [www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org](http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org)) and CO3 (the Chief Executive Officers of the Third Sector [www.co3.org.uk](http://www.co3.org.uk)) and from qualitative feedback from formal and informal engagement with sector leaders, workers and volunteers.

The Department supports the Sector through a range of programmes & initiatives and is the single biggest government funder of the work of the sector. NICVA estimates that over 53,000 people work in the Voluntary and Community Sector in NI and the sector accounts for a bigger share of the active workforce in NI than at a UK level (7% in NI compared to 3% at a UK level<sup>2</sup>). Women account for a greater share of the VCS workforce than the overall NI

workforce – a feature also found in other parts of the UK and in Ireland.

A large proportion of organisations in this sector operate with very lean budgets. Charity commission data shows that 29% of organisations have an annual income under £10,000 and only 21% have incomes above £100,000. 40% of respondents to the Department's recent survey of sector organisations reported annual income of under £50,000. NICVA estimates the annual income of the sector at £819m, 56% of which comes from government departments and

agencies, 22% from public donations and 13% from earned income.

Given pressures on the sector, the Department will increase Voluntary and Community Sector funding by £2.8m on the Department's 2024-25 Final EQIA Budget position funding level. The Department's assessment of the likely impact of the Budget 2025-26 Voluntary and Community Sector allocation upon those within Section 75 categories has not identified any potential adverse or differential impacts:

Group	Impact
Religious Belief	<p>The 2021 Census breakdown of religious belief in NI showed that 44% of the population are Protestant, 46% Catholic, 1% other religions and 9% no religion. An Equality Commission study for 2021<sup>3</sup>, external showed that 43.5% of the workforce was Protestant, 43.4%, was Catholic and 13.1% were "non-determined".</p> <p>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 1,922 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 489 charities.</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/FETO%20Monitoring%20Reports/No32/MonReport32.pdf>



Political Opinion	<p>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. The Census also found, 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. Finally, the Census 2021, identified 598,800 people (31.5%) living here as solely or along with other national identities 'Northern Irish'. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011.</p> <p>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 489 charities. The advancement of citizenship or community development is a stated charitable purpose for 3042 charities.</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>
Race	<p>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 489 charities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 9% of charities provide services in support of ethnic minorities.</li> <li>- 7% of charities provide services in support of community safety/crime prevention.</li> <li>- 3% of charities provide services in support of Travellers – 3% of charities provide services in support of Asylum seekers/refugees.</li> <li>- 3% of charities provide victim support services.</li> </ul> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>

Age	<p>The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of different age groups: e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 26% of charities provide services in support of older people.</li> <li>- 8% of charities provide services in support of carers. – 48% of charities provide services in support of children (5- 13)</li> <li>- 44% of charities provide services in support of young people (14-25)</li> <li>- 20% of charities provide services in support of preschool children (0-5)</li> </ul> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>
Marital Status	<p>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).</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>
Sexual Orientation	<p>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 489 charities – 2% of charities provide services in relation to sexual orientation</p> <p>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%</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>

Gender	<p>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 – 20% of charities provide services in support of men</p> <p>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.</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department’s increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>
Disability	<p>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 1277 charities – 14% of charities provide services in support of mental health – 11% of charities provide services in support of physical disability – 10% of charities provide services in support of learning disability – 6% of charities provide addiction support services – 6% of charities provide services in support of sensory disability.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department’s increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>

Dependents	<p>The 2021 NI Census indicated that 29% per cent of households in Northern Ireland contained dependent children and 45% contained at least one person with a long-term health problem or disability.</p> <p>The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of this group: e.g. – 21% of charities provide services in support of parents – 8% of charities provide services in support of carers.</p> <p>No likely adverse or differential impact on this S75 group has been identified from the Department's increased allocation to the voluntary and community sector.</p>
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### iii. Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs);

The Department's 11 ALBs provide services and support to a range of sectors including Housing, Arts, Libraries, Museums and Sports. The Minister recognises that there are challenges for the Arm's Length Bodies to live within their Budget 2025-26 allocations and it is proposed to make a general allocation of £3.7m across the ALB's and allocate some specific funding to National Museums NI and Libraries NI to support operational stability and continued public accessibility to key cultural and educational institutions. However, given the continued constrained financial position facing the Department in 2025-26, providing further increased allocations to ALBs is not affordable at this time. The Department will continue to work closely with Arm's Length Bodies on monitoring the service impacts arising from their Budget 2025-26 allocations.

EQIA Monitoring, following the Department's Budget 2024-25 Final Budget decisions and allocations to ALBs, identified no significant adverse impacts on Section 75 groups resulting from 2024-25 Budget decisions.

Amongst the ALB's are two that are rights based, and the Minister recognises the potential impact on rights-based work related to children and young people and older people in NICCY and COPNI. The Department will work with these organisations to support them to limit the impact on direct rights-based work.

The Department's assessment of the likely impact of Budget 2025-26 ALB allocation upon those within Section 75 categories has not identified any potential adverse or differential impacts:

Groups	Impact
<p>All Groups –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Religious Belief</li> <li>- Political Opinion</li> <li>- Race</li> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Marital Status</li> <li>- Sexual Orientation</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Disability</li> <li>- Dependents</li> </ul>	<p>The Department's Budget allocations to its funded Arm's Length Bodies benefit all citizens across NI within these S75 groups.</p> <p>Whilst the Department faces a heavily constrained financial position in 2025-26, all DfC funded Arm's Length Bodies will receive an additional General Allocation in 2025-26, above their 2024-25 funding level.</p> <p>EQIA Monitoring following the Department's Budget 2023-24 and 2024-25 Final Budget allocations to ALBs, identified no significant adverse impacts on Section 75 groups resulting from 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budget decisions.</p> <p>The Department will continue to work closely with Arm's Length Bodies on monitoring the service impacts arising their Budget 2025-26 allocations.</p>

#### iv. Supporting People Programme and Homelessness

- **The Supporting People** programme is the policy and funding framework for housing support services. The Programme assists 19,500 vulnerable people each year to live independently and is focused on four thematic areas; working with people who are experiencing homelessness, young people, older people and people with a disability including mental health and learning disabilities.
- Supporting People provides housing support services to assist vulnerable people in to live independently: providing support services that reduce hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness, assisting transitions to independent living from institutionalised environments; and maintaining tenancies. The Programme helps service users to

access welfare benefits, gain or sustain employment, live independently, better manage their physical and mental health, contribute to society and social networks and access crisis accommodation and healthcare.

- The most visible form of **homelessness** involves people who are seen living on the streets, but the issue of homelessness is much broader than that, including for example, people living in temporary accommodation, people living in poor conditions that are damaging to their health, people who are at risk of violence if they stay at their current accommodation, people staying with family or friends (often referred to as sofa surfing), people living in very overcrowded conditions and people living in a house that is unsuitable for their physical needs.

Anyone can become homeless, but issues such as unemployment,

poor physical and mental health, alcohol and substance misuse, relationship breakdown, and combinations of all these, will increase the risk of losing a home and being unable to quickly find another. Crisis<sup>4</sup> have noted that 'People become and stay homeless for a whole range of complex and overlapping reasons which are a combination of structural factors in society and individual support needs, decisions, and actions. Solving homelessness therefore is about much more than putting a roof over people's heads. As well as the impact on the individuals, there are also recognised costs to the economy. The Minister acknowledges the hugely important role the NI Housing Executive delivers in addressing Homelessness and delivering the Supporting People Programme in NI.

The Minister proposes an **additional £3.7m above the 2024-25 Budget position**, to help bring forward new and extended services which align to the 3 year Supporting People Strategy and aim to prevent homelessness. The proposed Homelessness allocation recognises the need to provide stability of funding for Community Prevention, and investment in Strategic Prevention to allow a focus on working with delivery partners to facilitate the implementation of new initiatives to reduce homeless demands through increased prevention activity.

The Department's assessment of the likely impact of the Budget 2025-26 Supporting People and Homelessness allocations upon those within Section 75 categories, has not identified any potential adverse or differential impacts:

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<sup>4</sup> Crisis Policy Briefing: Introduction to Homelessness & Housing, Crisis  
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/introduction-to-homelessness-and-housing>

Groups	Impact
<p>All Groups –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Religious Belief</li> <li>- Political Opinion</li> <li>- Race</li> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Marital Status</li> <li>- Sexual Orientation</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Disability</li> <li>- Dependents</li> </ul>	<p>The Department's Budget decisions including a £3.7m increase in funding for the Supporting People Programme and Homelessness above the 2024-25 Budget position. This will help ensure continued viability of the programme and support homelessness interventions. This will provide positive benefit for people across S75 groups, including older people and people with a disability including mental health and learning disabilities who could otherwise be disproportionately. However, potentially all vulnerable citizens across NI in S75 groups could benefit from these supports, if eligible.</p> <p>A report in 2020 identified significant shortfalls in supply of housing support particularly for the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older people with housing support needs (service shortfall of 9% or c. 920 units).</li> <li>• Women who are at risk of domestic violence (service shortfall of 49% or c.650 units).</li> <li>• People with learning disability or mental health issues (service shortfall of 15-21% or c.540 units).</li> <li>• Homeless people experiencing alcohol or drug issues, homeless families, offenders and other homeless people (service shortfall of 12-24% or c. 540 units).</li> </ul> <p>The additional funding will help meet increasing costs, thereby ensure continued access to vulnerable people, including those in Section 75 groups.</p> <p>The Department will continue to work closely with NI Housing Executive on monitoring the service impacts arising from the Budget 2025-26 allocations.</p>

## **v. Employment Support**

Employment is seen as the best route out of poverty and the Minister places significant value on the collaborative and partnership working arrangements in place across departments, with councils and external providers, to provide employment interventions at both an individual and local level.

Working in partnership, the Department funds a suite of employability provision to support people to find and retain employment. The provision aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions by working through a multi-agency partnership approach at local and regional level, with regional objectives being flexible to meet the needs presented by localised conditions, such as economically inactive, long-term unemployment, youth unemployment, disability, and skilled labour supply. The employment interventions positively impact across S75 groups, helping those seeking work and provide critical support to help people with a disability or health condition to remain in work.

The Department is currently assessing the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper. In light of this, and to address Northern Ireland's high levels of economic inactivity and the largest disability employment gap in the UK, the Minister is keen to extend the Department's suite of employment support interventions. To support delivery of the necessary employment support interventions, in the absence of securing additional funding in the 2025-26 Budget, in-year funding bids are proposed. Additionally, the Department will utilise its own limited 2025-26 Budget to support more people, including disabled people and people with health conditions to move closer to work, find work, and progress in work.

The Department's assessment of the likely impact of increased investment in Employment Support interventions, upon those within Section 75 categories, identified the following potential positive impacts:



Group	Impact
Religious Belief	<p>The 2021 Census breakdown of religious belief in NI showed that 44% of the population are Protestant, 46% Catholic, 1% other religions and 9% no religion. An Equality Commission study for 2021<sup>5</sup>, external showed that 43.5% of the workforce was Protestant, 43.4%, was Catholic and 13.1% were “non-determined”.</p> <p>The Department’s employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>
Political Opinion	<p>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. The Census also found, 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. Finally, the Census 2021, identified 598,800 people (31.5%) living here as solely or along with other national identities as ‘Northern Irish’. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011.</p> <p>The Department’s employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/FETO%20Monitoring%20Reports/No32/MonReport32.pdf>

Race	<p>The Department has no specific data to determine the impact of the overall budget and not filling staff vacancies on this group. The 2021 Census recorded that 3.5% (66,600) people were from ethnic minority groups.</p> <p>The intersectionality of gendered poverty compounds its impact on women with other marginalised identities. Black women, for instance, face higher odds of being single parents and working low-wage jobs. Additionally, households belonging to Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are more likely to have dependent children and larger families, making them more susceptible to reductions in Universal Credit.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>
Age	<p>The 2021 census indicated that 17% of the 1.9m people resident in Northern Ireland are 65 and over, 19% are aged 0-14, 12% age 15-25, and 52% age 25 – 64.</p> <p>The Department's Audit of Inequalities identifies young people (18-24 year olds) as having the lowest working age employment rates and the highest rates of unemployment and economic inactivity. Young people, in particular those aged 18 to 24, face a particular disadvantage in the labour market and therefore could be adversely impacted by budget policy. This has been highlighted in researched reports from the Centre for Labour and Social Studies<sup>7</sup>, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development<sup>8</sup>, European Economic and Social Committee<sup>9</sup>, City and Guilds<sup>10</sup> and the TUC<sup>11</sup>.</p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>

<sup>6</sup> <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>

<sup>7</sup> Labour Market Realities: Barriers Facing Young People | Blog | CLASS ([classonline.org.uk](http://classonline.org.uk))

<sup>8</sup> Recruiting young people facing disadvantage: an evidence review ([cipd.co.uk](http://cipd.co.uk))

<sup>9</sup> Young people are worse off than older generations in today's labour market | European Economic and Social Committee ([europa.eu](http://europa.eu))

<sup>10</sup> Youth Misspent: Uncovering the harsh realities for Britain's young people in today's job market - News ([cityandguilds.com](http://cityandguilds.com))

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/young-workers-three-times-more-likely-be-employed-sectors-where-jobs-are-most-risk-tuc>

Marital Status	<p>Whilst the Department has no specific data to determine the impact of the resource budget on this group, in 2021 there were 7,921 marriages in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Women experience higher rates of poverty than men for two main interconnected reasons: women typically earn lower wages per hour and work fewer paid hours over their lifetimes, while also facing income loss due to caregiving responsibilities. Although this wage gap may be offset by the earnings of male partners in dual income (and mixed sex) households, it leaves single women, pensioners, and especially single parents in precarious financial situations, susceptible to poverty-level incomes.</p> <p>Women, particularly unmarried/single mothers, rely more heavily on benefits as part of their income, rendering them vulnerable to cuts in benefits. Moreover, as we see in benefit take-up rates, women are more likely to qualify for means tested benefits, exacerbating their struggle to escape poverty.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>
Sexual Orientation	<p>In terms of total population data, the 2021 NI Census data indicates that 2.1% of the household population in Northern Ireland identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. The Continuous Household Survey 2022 records 0.7% of participants as gay/lesbian, 0.6% bisexual, 0.3% Other, 1% undetermined and 97.3% heterosexual.</p> <p>In the absence of data, it is difficult to determine the impact on this group of the Department's 2025-26 budget allocation. However, some available research would suggest that bisexual women are more likely to claim disability-related benefits than their heterosexual counterparts, and gay and bisexual men are more likely to claim work-related benefits than their heterosexual counterparts<sup>13</sup>.</p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>

12 <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>

13 <https://lgbtqwelfare.stir.ac.uk/2022/12/08/lgb-access-to-welfare-benefits/>

Gender	<p>NISRA population statistics indicate that men and women make up roughly equal parts of NI's 1.9m population.</p> <p>However, on the whole, women make up the majority of benefit claimants. At face value, this could be for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women, especially low-income women, are more likely to manage their household finances and therefore are more likely to make and manage claims, and more likely to lead on household bills and budgets.</li> <li>• However, women are also more likely to suffer financial vulnerability, earn less on average, and have less to retire on than men. Recent analysis by the Pensions Policy Institute found that women need to work an additional 19 years to keep up with men's pensions.</li> <li>• Women earn less than men and therefore could be entitled to more benefits, and higher benefit rates as a result when they do claim. Lower earnings, career breaks for family care, and providing more unpaid care than men leave women in a financially poorer position<sup>14</sup>.</li> </ul> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>
Disability	<p>The 2021 Census indicates that nearly 45% of households in Northern Ireland, with one or more people in the household, contain at least one person with a disability (40% for 2011).</p> <p>NISRA statistics show that 21% of adults in Northern Ireland are classed as having a disability. Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty. The poverty rate for disabled people has remained broadly constant at around a third since 2013/14.<sup>15</sup> The difference is particularly stark for working-age adults: those who are disabled are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those who are not (38% and 17% respectively).</p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>

14 <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>

15 JRF UK Poverty 2023 - [https://files.localgov.co.uk/jrf\\_638103267396801742.pdf](https://files.localgov.co.uk/jrf_638103267396801742.pdf)

Dependents	<p>The 2021 NI Census indicated that 29% per cent of households in Northern Ireland contained dependent children and 45% contained at least one person with a long-term health problem or disability.</p> <p>Work is recognised as the best way out of poverty and is an important step to wellbeing and mental health recovery, improving self-esteem and confidence and reducing psychological distress, and is likely to provide improved income for those people with dependents. Employment interventions also lead to better health, improved work ability and reduced costs related to production loss at work and sickness absence, including reduced costs for the already under pressure Health Service.</p> <p>The Department's employment support provisions services benefit all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has a constrained 2025-26 Budget position, employment support provision will be maintained at 2024-25 levels and additional funding will be sought to support the impacts of the recently announced welfare changes in GB, as set out under the Pathways to Work Green Paper, and employability support proposals from the Get Britain Working White Paper.</p>
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## vi. Discretionary Support

The Department's Discretionary Support (DS) Scheme provides support to people facing financial hardship. The Department's historic Baseline budget for Discretionary Support Grants totalled £13.7m, however, given pressures facing households, the Minister set the 2024-25 Budget at £25.5m. Given the continued financial pressures faced by many people, the Minister will maintain the Discretionary Support Grant Budget at £25.5m for 2025-26. This allocation will ensure support is available for eligible people facing financial stress in 2025-26. Furthermore, Capital funded hardship loans will continue in 2025-26.

With rising poverty levels, failure to sustain Discretionary Support would impact most on those already

disproportionately impacted, including low-income families, disabled people, older people, women and children. The monitoring data, compiled following the policy changes introduced in July 2023, showed no greater negative impact on lone parents and females compared to claims from all Section 75 groups. Discretionary Support has been available to all eligible people in 2024-25, with monitoring indicating no negative or disproportionate impact on any Section 75 group.

The Department's assessment of the likely impact of its Budget 2025-26 decisions on Discretionary Support provision upon those within Section 75 categories, identified the following potential positive impacts:

Group	Impact
Religious Belief	<p>The 2021 Census breakdown of religious belief in NI showed that 44% of the population are Protestant, 46% Catholic, 1% other religions and 9% no religion.</p> <p>The Department's DS Scheme benefits all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, almost half (48%) of the applicants identified as Roman Catholic. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>
Political Opinion	<p>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. The Census also found, 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. Finally, the Census 2021, identified 598,800 people (31.5%) living here as solely or along with other national identities as 'Northern Irish'. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011.</p> <p>The Department's DS Scheme benefits all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, 34% of the applicants identified as Irish. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>

Race	<p>The 2021 Census recorded that 3.5% (66,600) people were from ethnic minority groups.</p> <p>The intersectionality of gendered poverty compounds its impact on women with other marginalised identities. Black women, for instance, face higher odds of being single parents and working low-wage jobs. Additionally, households belonging to Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are more likely to have dependent children and larger families, making them more susceptible to changes in Universal Credit.<sup>16</sup></p> <p>The Department's DS Scheme benefits all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, 96% of the applicants identified as white. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>
Age	<p>The 2021 census indicated that 17% of the 1.9m people resident in Northern Ireland are 65 and over, 19% are aged 0 -14, 12% age 15 - 25, and 52% age 25 – 64.</p> <p>The Department's DS Scheme benefits all eligible citizens of all ages across NI. In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, 51% of the applicants were recorded as being aged between 16 - 34. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>

16 <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>



Marital Status	<p>The Department's DS Scheme benefits all eligible citizens across NI within this S75 group. Whilst the Department has no specific data to determine the impact of the resource budget on this group, in 2021 there were 7,921 marriages in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Women experience higher rates of poverty than men for two main interconnected reasons: women typically earn lower wages per hour and work fewer paid hours over their lifetimes, while also facing income loss due to caregiving responsibilities. Although this wage gap may be offset by the earnings of male partners in dual income (and mixed sex) households, it leaves single women, pensioners, and especially single parents in precarious financial situations, susceptible to poverty-level incomes.</p> <p>The monitoring data indicated that the Discretionary Support policy changes of July 2023 did not negatively impact single mothers more than any other Section 75 group.</p> <p>The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>
Sexual Orientation	<p>In terms of total population data, the 2021 NI Census data indicates that 2.1% of the household population in Northern Ireland identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. The Continuous Household Survey 2022 records 0.7% of participants as gay/lesbian, 0.6% bisexual, 0.3% Other, 1% undetermined and 97.3% heterosexual.</p> <p>In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, 11% of the applicants identified as Gay/lesbian/bisexual/other. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>
Gender	<p>NISRA population statistics indicate that men and women make up roughly equal parts of NI's 1.9m population.</p> <p>The monitoring data indicated that the Discretionary Support policy changes of July 2023 did not negatively impact women more than men.</p> <p>The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>



Disability	<p>The 2021 Census indicates that nearly 45% of households in Northern Ireland had one or more people in the household with a disability (40% for 2011).</p> <p>NISRA statistics show that 21% of adults in Northern Ireland are classed as having a disability. Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty. The poverty rate for disabled people has remained broadly constant at around a third since 2013/14.<sup>17</sup> The difference is particularly stark for working-age adults: those who are disabled are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those who are not (38% and 17% respectively).</p> <p>In the Department's report covering Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims from August 2021 to March 2023, 54% of the applicants considered themselves to have a physical or mental health condition. The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>
Dependents	<p>The 2021 NI Census indicated that 29% per cent of households in Northern Ireland contained dependent children and 45% contained at least one person with a long-term health problem or disability.</p> <p>The poverty rate among carers continues to be above those who are not carers. Almost 1 in 3 children in the UK are living in poverty (31%). Nearly half of children in lone-parent families live in poverty, compared with 1 in 4 of those in couple families. Of the working-age adults, lone parents are by far the most likely of any family type to be struggling with poverty. The child poverty rate for children in families with three or more children is almost twice as high as the rate for children in one or two child families (47% compared with 24%). This means around 1 in 4 children in one or two child families are in poverty, compared with almost 1 in 2 children in families with three or more children.<sup>18</sup></p> <p>High levels of poverty are more likely to be experienced by people with dependents, including dependent adults.</p> <p>The decision to maintain Discretionary Support at 2024-25 levels will ensure support is available for all eligible citizens within this S75 group.</p>

17 JRF UK Poverty 2023 - [https://files.localgov.co.uk/jrf\\_638103267396801742.pdf](https://files.localgov.co.uk/jrf_638103267396801742.pdf)

18 <https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/equality-diversity-and-the-disability-duties/screening-outcome-reports/screening-reports-2023/screening-reports-april-to-june-2023/hardship-fund-scheme-equality-screening>

### **vii. Councils & other funded organisations**

As outlined, the Department's Resource expenditure is necessary to meet statutory, contractual, and other inescapable policy obligations and spend, and as such there is minimal scope to allocate the Department's 2025-26 Resource Budget differently. The budget allocation approach taken in 2025-26, like previous years, will maximise use of the Department's limited Resource allocation, to avoid any adverse impacts on Section 75 groups.

Given the scale of the financial challenge faced in 2025-26, Resource funding to councils and other funded organisations will be maintained predominantly remain at 2024-25 levels.

The Department has not identified any adverse or disproportionate impacts on people in Section 75 categories, related to this budget allocation decision. However, views are welcomed through the EQIA on any adverse or disproportionate impacts, and how these could be mitigated.

### **viii. New Build Social Housing and Other High Priority Capital**

The provision of New Build **Social Housing** is a priority for the Minister, but the 2025-26 capital allocations will have a significant detrimental impact on the numbers of new social homes that can be built through the Social Housing Development Programme in 2025-26. This Programme is the means to counter increasing housing waiting lists, which are currently at record levels. The target for 2025-26 is 2,000-unit new starts, however Budget allocations will currently only support in the region of 1,000-unit new starts in 2025-26. While this is a more favourable opening position to 2024-25, it will still not even match the final new starts of 1,504 units in 2024-25.

The **Affordable Warmth Scheme** addresses the effects of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency and is directed at low-income households. The proposal to allocate £2.5m (plus honouring grant offers already made of £5.0m in 2025-26) would allow approximately 480 additional approvals to be made in 2025-26

Given the shortfall on the Department's Capital DEL 2025-26 requirements, the Department's assessment of the likely impact of its Capital allocations upon those within Section 75 categories identified the following potential adverse impacts:

Group	Impact
Religious Belief	<p>The 2021 Census breakdown of religious belief in NI showed that 44% of the population are Protestant, 46% Catholic, 1% other religions and 9% no religion. An Equality Commission study for 2021<sup>19</sup>, external showed that 43.5% of the workforce was Protestant, 43.4%, was Catholic and 13.1% were “non-determined”.</p> <p>With the exception of housing, there is very little available evidence to indicate that the constrained Capital allocations would result in a negative or positive differential in relation to religious belief.</p> <p>Shifting demographics, spatial segregation in residential communities, not least in neighbourhoods dominated by social housing, and difficulties in delivering new housing supply make for significant inefficiencies in the local housing system. The complexity of these issues demands more comprehensive analysis in respect of demand for social housing and the barriers and enablers of meeting social housing needs at different spatial scales over time. Understanding the circumstances and perspectives of people from other, or indeed unknown, religions is also important as the changing composition of Northern Ireland, particularly in some locations, warrants further examination. With limited descriptive data, this analysis observed the following community differentials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Northern Ireland data, Catholic households wait longer than Protestant households to be allocated social housing and are allocated proportionately fewer homes, despite comprising a greater proportion of the waiting list and a greater proportion of applicants in housing stress.</li> <li>- Community differentials in terms of proportionate allocations may have narrowed over time for a variety of reasons, reflecting population shifts and changes in self-identification, but lengthening waiting times for social housing have been uneven, disproportionately affecting applicants from other religions and Catholics.</li> <li>- These patterns are complicated by the fact that dual housing markets exist with different pressures on housing demand and supply in different locations. In areas with the greatest shortages of new social housing supply, Catholic applicants wait the longest prior to being allocated a home; except in North Belfast, where people from other or unknown religions wait the longest.</li> </ul>

19 <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/FETO%20Monitoring%20Reports/No32/MonReport32.pdf>

	<p>- In terms of housing conditions, people from other religions or no religion have the smallest homes in terms of square metres and experience the most overcrowding, despite the fact that the average Catholic household is slightly larger (in terms of family size) than households from other religions. However, Catholics comprise the largest proportion of people in overcrowded homes.</p> <p>- People from other religions, mixed religions or no religions are the most likely to live in non-decent homes, and Catholic households the least likely.</p> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation and resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately impact on people identifying as Roman Catholic, as well as people from other religions.</p>
Political Opinion	<p>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. The Census also found, 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. Finally, the Census 2021, identified 598,800 people (31.5%) living here as solely or along with other national identities 'Northern Irish'. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011.</p> <p>There is insufficient data or existing evidence to draw any conclusions about the relationship between housing and other priority Capital requirements and people with different political opinions</p>

Race	<p>The 2021 Census recorded that 3.5% (66,600) people were from ethnic minority groups.</p> <p>With the exception of housing, there is very little available evidence to indicate that the constrained Capital allocations would result in a negative or positive differential in relation to racial groups.</p> <p>Data limitations constrain the precise understanding of how similar or divergent different ethnic groups' circumstances may be, but the data<sup>20</sup> and literature review highlighted certain differentials as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower proportions of Black residents and those from the EU Accession countries are in homeownership and among minority ethnic and migrant groups there is a higher prevalence of private renting.</li> <li>• Access to social housing varies between different minority ethnic groups, with some minorities (African and households of mixed ethnicity) waiting longer than the White population, and some groups (Chinese, Irish Travellers and households of other ethnicity) a shorter length of time than White applicants before being allocated a home. It is uncertain whether these are persistent or newly emerging patterns as data is limited.</li> <li>• Access to quality transit and settled sites for Irish Travellers is limited and although they do not wait a long time for social housing, this is not always their first choice of home. Irish Travellers experience a serious lack of basic amenities on some sites, identified as a persistent theme.</li> <li>• People from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly Black people and Irish Travellers, experience significantly more overcrowding than other White people, especially in housing association and private rented sector properties.</li> <li>• Racial attacks on people from minority ethnic communities' homes is a critical concern, with implications for the safety of the home.</li> </ul> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation for Housing, resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately impact on people from different race groups.</p>
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<sup>20</sup> HSS: Draft EQIA (communities-ni.gov.uk)

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Age	<p>The local charitable sector provides specific services to meet the needs of different age groups: e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 26% of charities provide services in support of older people.</li><li>- 8% of charities provide services in support of carers. – 48% of charities provide services in support of children (5- 13)</li></ul> <p>Indicators of inequalities for different age groups were found as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor physical housing conditions in Northern Ireland's stock have declined but older people remain more likely to have inadequate non-decent housing conditions than younger age groups.</li><li>• Homeownership contains the largest pool of older people in poor housing conditions. Previous reports have highlighted this differential suggesting it is a persistent problem.</li><li>• Outright ownership is associated with a reduction in the incidence of relative poverty once housing costs are taken into account for older homeowners.</li><li>• Homeownership's poverty reducing qualities in old age are well documented, a function of the front loading of housing costs in this tenure.</li><li>• Private renting is associated with a significant increase in poverty after housing costs for people aged 16 to 24 years old.</li><li>• Young people are also more likely to suffer from underfunding of the arts and sports sector.</li></ul> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation for Housing, Affordable Warmth, Regeneration and Culture, Arts and Heritage, Sports and Green growth, and the resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately and adversely impact on people of different ages.</p>
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Marital Status	<p>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).</p> <p>With the exception of housing, there is very little available evidence to indicate that the constrained Capital allocations would result in a negative or positive differential in relation to marital status.</p> <p>Marital status is rarely a focus of housing studies but data resources do allow some examination of different people's housing outcomes. Marital status does not, however, neatly align with people's living arrangements, which can be more influential than status alone. Some trends were apparent that placed some households, those likely to include more single income households, at a potential disadvantage in the housing market. The following differentials were observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Single, divorced and separated people experienced poorer housing conditions than married people, especially in the private rented sector, with divorced and separated people having the highest incidence of non-decent homes.</li><li>• Single people (and couples without children) had the highest incidence of negative equity, following the housing market downturn, with resulting constraints on mobility and remortgaging. But married and divorced or separated people are likely to experience greater sums of negative equity.</li><li>• Age and cohort effects may influence some of these outcomes but the impact of relationship breakdown on housing outcomes is under-explored.</li></ul> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation and the resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately and adversely impact on people of different marital status.</p>
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Sexual Orientation	<p>In the 2021 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'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4.1% of adults (1 in 25) in Belfast identified as LGB+, while 1.1% of adults in Mid Ulster identified as LGB+.</li><li>• 4.6% of people aged 16 to 24 identified as LGB+, this falls to 0.3% of people aged 65 and over.</li><li>• 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%</li></ul> <p>Generally, attitudes towards lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) people have softened considerably in Northern Ireland over the last decade (as reported in the Equality Awareness Survey, 2011) and stakeholders noted parallel improvements in agencies' approaches to meeting the needs of LGB people.</p> <p>There is insufficient data or existing evidence to draw any conclusions about the relationship between housing and other priority Capital requirements and people with different sexual orientations.</p>
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Gender	<p>In the 2021 Census, 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.</p> <p>Arts Council NI data shows that the majority of artists within the sector who responded identified as female (including transgender women) at 2414 (52%) in 2020/21 and 2913 (53%) in 2021/22. Males working in the sector represent the second largest group at 2193 (47%) in 2020/21 and 2547 (46%) in 2021/22. The workforce in the arts is typically characterised as having a slightly greater proportion of females to males working in the sector. Interestingly, there were slightly more applications from males than females across the emergency funding programmes.</p> <p>Differentials in the housing outcomes of people of different gender were apparent in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, households with female household reference persons have smaller homes and are more frequently in rented accommodation than households with male household reference persons. Single women that live alone, however, obtain larger homes and are more frequently in owner-occupation than single men living alone, suggesting that intersections with dependants, marital status or living arrangements and income is important to housing outcomes.</li> <li>• Other households of female household reference persons are more frequently found in social housing than those of male household reference persons. Lone parents were overwhelmingly female and predominantly in either the private or social renting sector.</li> <li>• Older women more frequently experience poor housing conditions than older men in rural areas, while in urban areas the situation is reversed and older men experience poorer housing conditions than older women.</li> <li>• Rates of relative poverty in the private rented sector increase once housing costs are taken into account more for women than men; but rates of relative poverty are reduced for women more than men, when the minimal housing costs in outright homeownership are considered.</li> </ul> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation for Housing, Affordable Warmth, Regeneration and Culture, Arts and Heritage, Sports and Green growth, and the resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately and adversely impact on people of different genders.</p>
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Disability	<p>In the 2021 Census, 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).</p> <p>Northern Ireland has a slightly higher proportion of people with disability or life limiting conditions than in Great Britain. There is a large interaction between disability and older age and shared concerns about access to housing adaptations for older infirm people,</p> <p>but this should not mask inequalities experienced by smaller populations of people with learning disabilities and younger disabled people whose desires to live independently are not always achieved.</p> <p>Key indicators of inequalities between disabled and non-disabled people were found in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ability of people with learning disabilities to live independently away from parents and/or congregated institution-like settings is a persistent inequality not experienced by non-disabled people. The Government’s project to resettle all patients with learning disabilities away from hospitals to supported or independent living nears completion in 2016.</li><li>• There is a strong association between older people and disability; disabled people are also more likely to live in poor housing conditions than households with no disabled members.</li><li>• Disabled people of all ages face delays in securing occupational therapists and funding to ensure their homes are adapted to meet their needs, especially in the private market.</li></ul> <p>The Department’s constrained Capital allocation for Housing, Affordable Warmth, Regeneration and Culture, Arts and Heritage, Sports and Green growth, and the resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately and adversely impact on people with disabilities.</p>
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Dependents	<p>The 2021 NI Census indicated that 29% per cent of households in Northern Ireland contained dependent children and 45% contained at least one person with a long-term health problem or disability.</p> <p>With the exception of housing, there is very little available evidence to indicate that the constrained Capital allocations would result in a negative or positive differential in relation to people with dependants.</p> <p>Some differentials found were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low-income families are increasingly found in private renting, where they lack security of tenure, rather than social housing.</li><li>• Housing costs of private renting increases the rate of relative poverty among households with dependants by 27 percentage points compared to five percentage points for households without dependants.</li><li>• The proportion of non-decent homes for families in the private and social rented sectors was the same in 2009, but households without dependants in the private rented sector experienced poor conditions, with the highest rate of non-decent homes.</li><li>• Households with dependants are more likely to live in overcrowded social housing homes, especially lone parents and multi-adult households that may include dependent children, with the potential for adverse impacts on household members.</li><li>• Interactions with religion and ethnicity are likely here as Catholic and Black residents also experienced higher rates of crowding in social housing.</li></ul> <p>The Department's constrained Capital allocation and the resulting Budget policy are likely disproportionately and adversely impact on people with and without dependents.</p>
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## 8. Consideration of Mitigation / Alternative Policies

- 8.1 Like other departments, the Department faces a constrained financial position in 2025-26. In the context of delivering public services with constrained allocations and other inescapable pressures, the Minister has invested considerable time and effort to consider the 2025-26 Budget allocations to maximise and best support public service delivery. Work is also ongoing, as far as is possible, to drive out any efficiencies to help support the Department in both the current and future financial years.
- 8.2 Sustaining an accessible Social Security and financial support system, supporting people into employment and providing Social Housing are core priorities for the Minister, as well as the sectors the Department supports. The Department's budget will continue to be deployed in support of these objectives. The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations is also an important part of ongoing policy development, legislative activities, and operational programmes. In managing the Resource and Capital Budget allocations, the Minister will make every effort to protect front line service delivery and the sectors the Department supports.
- 8.3 The Minister will seek to ensure budget allocations are applied as far as possible in a manner that does not disproportionately or adversely affect one Section 75 category over another.
- 8.4 The Department would welcome comments on any potential equality implications arising from the 2025-26 Budget and will consider the need for any further mitigating actions in light of responses received during the consultation. Promotion of equality of opportunity and the protection of services to vulnerable groups will be a key consideration in the Minister's final Budget decisions.

## 9. Consultation, Publication and Decision

- 9.1 The Department is committed to seeking the views of those who are affected by the decisions required to live within its 2025-26 Resource and Capital Budget allocations. We are keen to hear from individuals and organisations about their views on the equality implications of the decisions being made and about any mitigations that the Department could put in place to better support equality of opportunity across Section 75 groups.
- 9.2 The Department will consult over a twelve-week period. Views received during this time will be used to inform the Minister's final allocation of funds to its business areas and ALBs, including any necessary mitigations. Responses will also be used to consider further in-year mitigation measures, inform in-year budget reallocation processes, and direct any additional funding (or further reductions) that emerge over the course of the financial year. As always, promotion of equality of opportunity and the protection of services to vulnerable groups will be a key consideration in final Budget decisions.
- 9.3 The purpose of this consultation paper is to set out the Department for Communities initial assessment of the impact of the Budget on spending proposals for the 2025-26 financial year. The Minister will consider the responses to this consultation before making any final decisions on its Budget 2025-26 allocations. The outcomes of the Department's EQIA will be posted on the Department's website.
- 9.4 The Department welcomes comment on any aspects of this document. Interested parties are encouraged to make responses by **11.59pm 7 August 2025**, which will be used to inform the Minister's Final 2025-26 Budget allocations, including any mitigations required.
- 9.5 Further consultations and equality screening will be considered, as appropriate, as plans to live within Budget 2025-26 allocation are considered.

# 10. Monitoring

- 10.1 The Department's Budget process including policy setting, monitoring of the Budget and the impact of allocations. This is a continuous and reflective cyclical process.
- 10.2 Throughout each financial year, the Department undertakes regular monitoring of Budget policy decisions. As part of the budget cycle, this monitoring data is used to inform in-year Monitoring bids to the Department of Finance and the Executive, and/or to mitigate any adverse or disproportionate impacts identified on Section 75 equality categories arising from budget allocations.
- 10.3 For Budget exercises, such as Budget 2025-26, monitoring data from previous budget policies implemented informed the Department's Budget 2025-26 funding requirements submitted to the Department of Finance. As part of the Budget 2025-26 exercise, informed by this monitoring data, the Department provided the Department of Finance with the high-level Section 75 equality impacts of the Department's funding requirements not being met in full. This information was provided to the Department of Finance for collation at Executive department level, to help support the Executive as decision makers in the setting of the Budget 2025-26 for Northern Ireland. This information also informed the Department's Budget 2025-26 Draft EQIA.

# 11. Confidentiality

11.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public the right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided in response to this consultation, including information about identity, should be made public or treated as confidential.

11.2 This means that information provided in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that -

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;

- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

11.3 For further information regarding confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office at -

Information Commissioner's  
Office – Northern Ireland

3rd Floor

14 Cromac Place,

Belfast

BT7 2JB

Telephone: **028 9027 8757**  
**/ 0303 123 1114**

Email: **ni@ico.org.uk**

Website: **<http://www.ico.org.uk>**

## 12.Consultation Questions

- 12.1 As set out in this document, like other departments, the Department's 2025-26 Budget position is challenging. Despite this, critical consideration has been given to the allocation of the Department's Budget in the best way to maximise and support public service delivery.
- 12.2 The Department's 2025-26 Budget EQIA presents the initial decisions taken by the Minister in respect of 2025-26 Budget allocations and outlines the potential impact to people in Section 75 categories of those decisions on the services and supports the Department provides.
- 12.3 In consulting on the Department's 2025-26 Budget allocations views are welcomed on the following:
1. Are there any data, needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Section 6 of the EQIA consultation document? If so, what are they and can you provide details?
  2. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in Section 7 of the EQIA Consultation document? If so, what are they?
  3. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts in allocation of the Department's 2025-26 Budget.
  4. Moving forward, to support development of the Executive's comprehensive 5-year budget sustainability plans, the Department has commenced development of its own 5-year Departmental Plan. Please provide your views on how the Department should shape future service delivery, and how this could be achieved with limited resources, for example, through revenue raising, savings delivery measures, or other options?
  5. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to this pro forma or the consultation process generally?
- 12.4 Comments are sought by **online survey**, email or postal response.

Financial Management Directorate  
Department for Communities  
Level 5, Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
Belfast,  
BT2 7EG

Telephone: **028 90512 625**

Email: **DFCBUDGETEQIA@COMMUNITIES-NI.GOV.UK**



12.5 The Department welcomes comment on any aspects of this document. Interested parties are encouraged to make responses as soon as possible. The information provided will help inform the allocation of 2025-26 funds, any mitigations required and may support further in-year bids. Responses provided will also be used to inform development of the Department's 5-year Plan.

12.6 The final deadline for responses is **11.59pm 7 August 2025**.

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