

Consultation Schedule – The Council Meeting 2 June 2026

	RECEIVED FROM	TITLE	SUBMISSION BY	CORPORATE RESPONSE Y/N
1.	Department of Health	Consultation on the regulation of Gene therapy medicinal products	22 June 2026	
	<p>Summary We are seeking views on proposed updates to the definition of Gene therapy medicinal products to better reflect advances in science and manufacturing.</p> <p>Consultation on the regulation of Gene therapy medicinal products - GOV.UK</p>			
2.	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland	30 June 2026	
	<p>Summary The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has launched a public consultation on proposed reforms to animal welfare policy in Northern Ireland. The primary method for responses is online via Citizen Space.</p> <p>Consultation on Proposed Animal Welfare Policy Reforms in Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</p>			
3.	Department of Education	Consultation on Leading Together for Excellence: A Transformed NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning	6 July 2026	
	<p>Summary Consultation on Leading Together for Excellence: A Transformed NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning.</p>			

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	Consultation on Leading Together for Excellence: A Transformed NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning Department of Education		
4.	Ulster University	Equality screening of new and revised policies	10 July 2026
	<p>In fulfilling the University's obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland (NI) Act 1998, the University's Equality Scheme (opens in new window) includes a commitment to consult on the implementation of new and revised policies, as defined by the Equality Commission NI, with regards to equality of opportunity and good relations.</p> <p>The University is currently consulting on the equality screening of the policies listed below. The consultation opened on Wednesday 1 April 2026 and will close on Friday 10 July 2026.</p> <p>In light of recent developments, the University is now also consulting on its 'Decision to propose 450 FTE redundancies and as a consequence submit a HR1 notification and commence a 90-day consultation period'. As the statutory 90-day consultation period is anticipated to close in approximately 9 weeks, there will be a shorter policy screening consultation period. The opening date for consultation is Wednesday 13 May 2026 and the closing date for comments is 10 July 2026.</p> <p>Consultation Exercises People and Culture</p>		
6.	Department for the Economy	Comhairliúchán ar Dhréachtbheartas Gaeilge na Roinne Geilleagair. Consultation on Draft Department for the Economy Irish Language Policy	23 July 2026
	<p>Summary</p> <p>Lorgaítear leis an chomhairliúchán seo do thuairimí ar Dhréachtbheartas Gaeilge na Roinne Geilleagair. Is é cuspóir an Bheartais Teanga seo na bealaí a leagan amach ina gcomhlíonfaidh an Roinn Geilleagair (RG) a tiomantas don Chairt Eorpach do Theangacha Réigiúnacha nó Mionlaigh (CETRM).</p>		

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	<p>This consultation seeks your views on the Draft Department for the Economy Irish Language Policy. The purpose of this Language Policy is to set out the ways in which Department for Economy (DfE) will fulfil its commitment to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML).</p> <p>Comhairliúchán ar Dhréachtbheartas Gaeilge na Roinne Geilleagair. Consultation on Draft Department for the Economy Irish Language Policy. Department for the Economy</p>			
7.	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Accessibility & Inclusion Plans Consultation 2026	6 August 2026	
	<p>Summary his equality scheme states the commitment of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council to fulfilling Section 75 statutory duties and the arrangements for this.</p> <p>We will commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively, and on time. We will have effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.</p> <p>We will develop and deliver a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring that all our councillors and staff are made fully aware of our equality scheme and understand the commitments and obligations within it. We will develop a programme of awareness raising for our consultees on the Section 75 statutory duties and our commitments in the equality scheme.</p> <p>We realise the important role that the community and voluntary sector and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented. Our Equality Scheme demonstrates how determined we are to</p>			

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	<p>ensure there are opportunities, for people affected by our work, to positively influence how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 duties.</p> <p><u>Introduction : Accessibility & Inclusion Plans Consultation 2026</u></p>		
8.	Department for the Economy	Proposals for Geothermal Regulation Consultation	7 August 2026
	<p>Summary This consultation seeks views on proposals to introduce a new statutory framework for the regulation of geothermal energy in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><u>Proposals for Geothermal Regulation Consultation Department for the Economy</u></p>		

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Available to View

RECEIVED FROM	TITLE	PUBLISHED
HSC Business Services Organisation	Equality Screening	Equality Screening - Business Services Organisation (BSO) Website
Department of Health	DoH Policies screened during the period – 1 January 2026 – 31 March 2026	DoH Policies screened during the period – 1 January 2026 – 31 March 2026 Department of Health
Department of Finance	Adoption Leave Policy	Copy attached
Department of Finance	Maternity Leave Policy	Copy attached

Open Consultations (previously Listed)

- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Consultation on the draft From Waste to Worth: Northern Ireland Waste Prevention Programme submission by 10 July 2026
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Consultation opens on fisheries management plan for non-quota shellfish submission by 17 July 2026

DoF Screening template - Department of Finance – Adoption Leave Policy

Screening is the first of two methods by which the necessary level of “regard” is demonstrated as being paid to the statutory equality goal, as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The DoF Equality Scheme commits us to screening our policies. This includes our strategies and plans, policies, legislative developments; and new ways of working such as – the introduction, change or end of an existing service, procedure, policy etc.

This screening template is designed to help business areas consider the likely equality and human rights impacts of their proposed decisions on different groups of customers, service users, staff and visitors.

Detailed information about the Section 75 equality duties and what they mean in practice is available on the Equality Commission’s website: <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened, should be ‘signed off’ and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made accessible on the DoF website as soon as possible following completion and made available in alternative formats on request.

All Section 75 consultees should be advised of the screening exercise once the final policy decision has been taken.

The screening template has 4 sections to complete. These are:

Section A - details about the policy / decision that is being screened.

Section B - 4 key questions that require you to outline the likely impacts on equality groups, and all supporting evidence.

Section C - 4 key questions in relation to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order and the Human Rights Act.

Section D - the formal record of the screening decision.

SECTION A

Information about the policy

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

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

Is this a new or revised policy?

Revised policy

a) Name of the policy

3.05 Adoption Leave

b) Brief Description of the policy

The current NICS Adoption Leave policy sets out the arrangements for adoption leave and pay for employees who adopt a child. It gives all eligible employees, who satisfy specified qualifying conditions, the right to 18 weeks' contractual adoption pay.

The revised NICS Adoption Leave policy will fulfil a commitment in the recent 2024/25 pay award to increase the period of contractual adoption pay for eligible staff to 26 weeks.

This increase is to be implemented for staff who satisfy the qualifying conditions for contractual adoption pay (the qualifying conditions are **NOT** changing); and

a) for UK adoption or fostering for adoption, have an expected date of placement on or after 6 April 2025; or

- b) for adoption from overseas, the child's expected date of entry into Northern Ireland is on or after 6 April 2025; or
- c) for parental order parents, the expected week of childbirth begins on or after 6 April 2025.

c) Aims of the policy/ Rationale behind the changes

The policy has been updated to include references to the increased contractual pay entitlement that has been introduced since the policy was last published.

The rationale behind the policy change is to meet a commitment in the 2024/25 pay award to increase the period of contractual adoption pay from 18 weeks to 26 weeks.

d) Who will the policy affect?

The policy will directly affect NICS staff who satisfy current qualifying conditions for contractual adoption pay where the expected date of placement, child's expected date of entry into Northern Ireland or expected week of childbirth (as applicable) is on or after 6 April 2025.

d) Is this a NICS wide policy?

Yes, this policy applies to all NICS staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial. However, the specific element of the policy that is changing, relating to an increase in the duration of the contractual adoption pay period, only applies to staff who qualify for contractual adoption pay.

e) Who will implement the policy?

Implementation of the policy will be carried out on behalf of the NICS by HRConnect.

f) Will this policy or revision address an existing inequality? Yes/No
If yes, please give details.

g) Will this policy or revision benefit any Section 75 categories? Yes/
If yes, please give details.

Yes. The revised entitlement applies equally to all staff in NICS who qualify for contractual adoption pay. Therefore, the revision will potentially benefit employees in any of the Section 75 categories.

h) Will this policy or revision have an adverse differential impact upon any of the Section 75 groupings? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.

Section B

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Set out all evidence below along with details of the different Section 75 groups you have met and / or consulted with to help inform your screening assessment. Please also provide details of priorities and needs identified for each Section 75 group.

- **Religious belief**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024 excluding those with a community background recorded as 'not determined', Protestants made up 49.9% and Catholics 50.1% of the NICS. However, Catholics are still underrepresented in the NICS compared to that of the economically active population.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of religious belief. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Political opinion**

The Civil Service does not collect data on the political opinion of its workforce.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2023 found that 30% of the Northern Ireland population describe themselves as Unionist, 28% as Nationalist and 37% as neither.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of political opinion. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Racial group**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 0.6% of NICS staff were from an ethnic minority (including members of mixed ethnic groups and the Irish Travelling Community). The proportion of NICS staff from an ethnic minority is significantly lower than from the economically active population (3.0%) comparator.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of racial group. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

Note - Data on ethnicity was missing for 2,190 staff (9.1%). These cases are excluded from the analyses.

- **Age**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024 the NICS has an older age profile than the economically active population 16-65+ comparator. In particular, the proportion of NICS staff aged 55 or over was 28.8%, while only 13.4% of NICS staff were aged 16-34.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of age. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Marital status**

The 2021 Census found that 38.07% of the NI population identified as single, 45.59% as married, 0.18% in a same sex partnership, 3.78% separated, 6.02% divorced or formerly in a same sex partnership which is now dissolved and 6.36% widowed.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of marital status. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Sexual orientation**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024, Of those staff for whom data are available;

- 3.5% described their orientation as towards someone of the same sex
- 2.4% towards both sexes
- 94.1% towards someone of different sex.

The 2021 Census reported the breakdown of the population in Northern Ireland in terms of sexual orientation was:

- 90.04% Heterosexual/Straight
- 4.57% Prefer not to say
- 3.30% Not Stated
- 1.17% Gay/Lesbian
- 0.75% Bisexual
- 0.17% Other sexual orientation

Note - data on sexual orientation was missing for 66.4% of Civil Service staff. These cases are excluded from the analyses.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of sexual orientation. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Men & women generally**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 that 50.2% of all NICS staff were female and 49.8% male. In 2022 the male / female staffing levels were evenly split at 50%.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of gender.

- **Disability**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 6.1% of NICS staff had a declared disability.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of disability. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Dependents**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 that for those staff which data is available - 37.9% stated they have dependants (January 2024). The term “dependant” however will be open to interpretation and may not capture all cases of caring responsibilities.

The Census 2021 indicates that:

- one person in eight of the population aged 5 or more (12.4% / 222,200 people) provided unpaid care to a relative or friend who had a health condition or illness;
- one person in twenty-five (3.8% / 68,700 people) provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week; and
- one person in five (124,600 people) of those who provided unpaid care was aged 40 to 64 - this equates to 56.1% of those who provide unpaid care.

Note - Data on dependents is missing for 64.5% of NICS staff. These cases are excluded from the analyses.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of whether they have or do not have dependants. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

If you have no evidence held, outline how you will obtain it:

The “Count Me In” campaign in 2023 was launched to encourage colleagues to update their equality data. Since then workforce data declaration rates have increased.

The NICS continues to take action to promote an open positive, supportive, accessible and inclusive workplace where everyone can be their authentic selves, participate fully and perform at their best and feel comfortable sharing their equality data.

Collection of this data will be considered in the design of the new HR and finance technology solution currently being procured through the Integr8¹ Programme.

Screening questions

There are 4 essential screening questions:

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories?
(~~minor/major~~/none)
2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories? (~~yes~~/no)
3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact upon good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (~~minor/major~~/none)
4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups? (~~Yes~~/No)

Are there likely impacts on Section 75 Categories?

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories?

- **Religious belief:**

^{1 1} Integr8 is a key strategic enabling programme for NICS which will contribute to the modernisation of HR and finance services, impacting on every civil servant and creating a more digitally enabled and agile delivery model.

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Political opinion:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Racial group:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Age:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Marital status:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Sexual orientation:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Men and women generally:**

Equality of opportunity. The proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy increases the length of time for which all eligible employees will be paid contractual adoption pay (full pay) from 18 weeks to 26 weeks.

What is the level of impact? Major positive impact achieved as eligible staff will have adoption pay period extended.

- **Disability:**

Equality of opportunity.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Dependants:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Adoption Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?

- **Religious belief:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Political opinion:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Racial group:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Age:**

This policy change affects people of all ages.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Marital status:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Sexual orientation:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Men and women generally:**

This policy change applies equally to people of all genders.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Disability:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Dependants:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

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

- **Religious belief:**

Good relations between people of different religious beliefs. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Political opinion:**

Good relations between people of different political opinion. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Racial group:**

Good relations between people of different racial groups. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups?

There is no opportunity to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial grouping within the policy change.

Opportunity to better promote good relations between groups? **No**

Additional considerations

Multiple Identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

The policy change applies equally to all eligible staff in NICS therefore no one will be differentially or negatively impacted through the policy.

None

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Alternatively there may already be policies in place which would mitigate any adverse impact identified.

Mitigation measures proposed:

Major positive impact achieved as eligible staff will have adoption pay period extended. No mitigation measures required.

Section C

DoF also has legislative obligations to meet under the [Disability Discrimination Order](#) and the [Human Rights Act](#) . The following questions relate to these two areas.

Consideration of Disability Duties

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity for DoF to better **promote positive attitudes** towards disabled people?

Explain your assessment in full

No.

The policy change applies equally to all eligible staff.

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity to actively **increase the participation** by disabled people in public life?

Explain your assessment in full

No, there is no impact, as detailed above.

Consideration of Human Rights

The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Articles 3 and 4 are classified as “absolute” rights i.e. the State can never withhold or take away these rights. All others are either “qualified” or “limited”. Further information is available via the following link

<http://www.nicshumanrightsguide.com/>

Indicate any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy / decision may have in relation to human rights issues.

	<u>Adverse Impact</u>	
	(delete as appropriate)	
Right to Life	Article 2	No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	Article 3	No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	Article 4	No
Right to liberty and security	Article 5	No
Right to a fair and public trial	Article 6	No
Right to no punishment without law	Article 7	No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	Article 8	No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	Article 9	No
Right to freedom of expression	Article 10	No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	Article 11	No
Right to marry and to found a family	Article 12	No

The prohibition of discrimination	Article 14	No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	Protocol 1 Article 1	No
Right to education	Protocol 1 Article 2	No
Right to free and secret elections	Protocol 1 Article 3	No

Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.

The revised Adoption Leave policy positively impacts Article 12 of the Human Rights Act which includes the right to found a family.

Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.

None

If you have identified any adverse impacts on human rights through this screening you must complete a Human Rights Impact Assessment: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/human-rights-impact-assessment-proforma>.

Monitoring Arrangements

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's [Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities \(July 2007\)](#):

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75MonitoringGuidance2007.pdf>

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

This policy is kept under review to ensure it takes account of any new legislation, case law, as well as any issues raised by HRConnect when applying the policy to individual cases.

A review of the policy will be commissioned by the end of April 2027.

Section D - Formal Record of Screening Decision

Title of Proposed Policy / Decision being screened:

Adoption Leave policy

I can confirm that the proposed policy / decision has been screened for (i) equality of opportunity, (ii) good relations disabilities duties and (iii) human rights issues

On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, I recommend that this policy / decision is –

* **Screened Out** – No EQIA necessary (no impacts)

Provide a brief note to explain how this decision was reached:

No Section 75 category groups were identified as being differentially or negatively impacted by the implementation of this policy.

Screening assessment completed by -

Name Frances Haire
Grade DP
Date 28 March 2025
And approved by –

Name Joan Fleetham
Grade G7
Date 7 April 2025

Central Support Team Notified (09 April 2025)

Equality Contacts advised (May 2026)

Screening uploaded to DoF website (18 May 2026)

DoF Screening template - Department of Finance - Maternity Leave Policy

Screening is the first of two methods by which the necessary level of “regard” is demonstrated as being paid to the statutory equality goal, as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The DoF Equality Scheme commits us to screening our policies. This includes our strategies and plans, policies, legislative developments; and new ways of working such as – the introduction, change or end of an existing service, procedure, policy etc.

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A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened, should be ‘signed off’ and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made accessible on the DoF website as soon as possible following completion and made available in alternative formats on request.

All Section 75 consultees should be advised of the screening exercise once the final policy decision has been taken.

The screening template has 4 sections to complete. These are:

Section A - details about the policy / decision that is being screened.

Section B - 4 key questions that require you to outline the likely impacts on equality groups, and all supporting evidence.

Section C - 4 key questions in relation to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order and the Human Rights Act.

Section D - the formal record of the screening decision.

SECTION A

Information about the policy

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

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

Is this a new or revised policy?

Revised policy

a) Name of the policy

[3.02 Maternity Leave](#)

b) Brief description of the policy

The current NICS Maternity Leave policy sets out the arrangements for maternity leave and pay and gives all eligible employees, who satisfy specified qualifying conditions, the right to 18 weeks' contractual maternity pay.

The revised NICS Maternity Leave policy will fulfil a commitment in the recent 2024/25 pay award to increase the period of contractual maternity pay for eligible staff to 26 weeks.

This increase is to be implemented for staff who satisfy the current qualifying conditions (qualifying conditions are **NOT** changing) for contractual maternity pay and have an expected week of childbirth on or after 6 April 2025. The current entitlement to 18 weeks' contractual maternity pay will continue to apply to those employees whose expected week of childbirth begins on or before 30 March 2025.

c) Aims of the policy/ rationale behind the changes

The policy has been updated to include references to the increased contractual pay entitlement that has been introduced since the policy was last published.

The rationale behind the policy change is to meet a commitment in the 2024/25 pay award to increase the period of contractual maternity pay from 18 weeks to 26 weeks.

d) Who will the policy affect?

The policy will directly affect NICS staff who satisfy the current qualifying conditions for contractual maternity pay and have an expected week of childbirth on or after 6 April 2025. .

e) Is this an NICS wide policy?

Yes, this policy applies to all NICS staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial. However, the specific element of the policy that is changing, relating to the duration of the contractual maternity pay period, only applies to staff who qualify for contractual maternity pay.

f) Who will implement the policy?

Implementation will be carried out on behalf of the NICS by HRConnect.

g) Will this policy or revision address an existing inequality? Yes/No
If yes, please give details.

h) Will this policy or revision benefit any Section 75 categories? Yes/No
If yes, please give details.

Yes. The revised entitlement applies equally to all staff in NICS who qualify for contractual maternity pay. Therefore the revision will benefit women.

- i) Will this policy or revision have an adverse differential impact upon any of the Section 75 groupings? Yes/No. If yes, please give details.

Section B

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Set out all evidence below along with details of the different Section 75 groups you have met and / or consulted with to help inform your screening assessment. Please also provide details of priorities and needs identified for each Section 75 group.

- **Religious belief**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024 excluding those with a community background recorded as 'not determined', Protestants made up 49.9% and Catholics 50.1% of the NICS. However, Catholics are still underrepresented in the NICS compared to that of the economically active population.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of religious belief. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Political opinion**

The Civil Service does not collect data on the political opinion of its workforce.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2023 found that 30% of the Northern Ireland population describe themselves as Unionist, 28% as Nationalist and 37% as neither.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of political opinion. The Department is not

aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Racial group**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 0.6% of NICS staff were from an ethnic minority (including members of mixed ethnic groups and the Irish Travelling Community). The proportion of NICS staff from an ethnic minority is significantly lower than from the economically active population (3.0%) comparator.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of racial group. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

Note - Data on ethnicity was missing for 2,190 staff (9.1%). These cases are excluded from the analyses.

- **Age**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024 the NICS has an older age profile than the economically active population 16-65+ comparator. In particular, the proportion of NICS staff aged 55 or over was 28.8%, while only 13.4% of NICS staff were aged 16-34.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of age. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Marital status**

The 2021 Census found that 38.07% of the NI population identified as single, 45.59% as married, 0.18% in a same sex partnership, 3.78% separated, 6.02% divorced or formerly in a same sex partnership which is now dissolved and 6.36% widowed.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of marital status. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Sexual orientation**

The Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 shows that at 1st January 2024, of those staff for whom data are available;

- 3.5% described their orientation as towards someone of the same sex
- 2.4% towards both sexes
- 94.1% towards someone of different sex.

The 2021 Census reported the breakdown of the population in Northern Ireland in terms of sexual orientation was:

- 90.04% Heterosexual / Straight
- 4.57% Prefer not to say
- 3.30% Not Stated
- 1.17% Gay / Lesbian
- 0.75% Bisexual
- 0.17% Other sexual orientation

Note - data on sexual orientation was missing for 66.4% of Civil Service staff. These cases are excluded from the analyses.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of sexual orientation. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Men & women generally**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 that 50.2% of all NICS staff were female and 49.8% male. In 2022 the male / female staffing levels were evenly split at 50%.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of gender. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Disability**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 6.1% of NICS staff had a declared disability.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of disability. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Dependents**

The Equality Statistics for the NICS shows at 1st January 2024 that for those staff which data is available - 37.9% stated they have dependants (January 2024). The term “dependant” however will be open to interpretation and may not capture all cases of caring responsibilities.

The Census 2021 indicates that:

- one person in eight of the population aged 5 or more (12.4% / 222,200 people) provided unpaid care to a relative or friend who had a health condition or illness;
- one person in twenty-five (3.8% / 68,700 people) provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week; and
- one person in five (124,600 people) of those who provided unpaid care was aged 40 to 64 - this equates to 56.1% of those who provide unpaid care.

Note - Data on dependents is missing for 64.5% of NICS staff. These cases are excluded from the analyses.

This policy change applies to all **eligible** NICS Staff, both Industrial and Non-Industrial, irrespective of whether they have or do not have dependants. The Department is not aware of any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

If you have no evidence held, outline how you will obtain it:

The “Count Me In” campaign in 2023 was launched to encourage colleagues to update their equality data. Since then workforce data declaration rates have increased.

The NICS continues to take action to promote an open positive, supportive, accessible and inclusive workplace where everyone can be their authentic selves, participate fully and perform at their best and feel comfortable sharing their equality data.

Collection of this data will be considered in the design of the new HR and finance technology solution currently being procured through the Integr8¹ Programme.

¹ Integr8 is a key strategic enabling programme for NICS which will contribute to the modernisation of HR and finance services, impacting on every civil servant and creating a more digitally enabled and agile delivery model.

Screening questions

There are 4 essential screening questions:

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories? (~~minor/major~~/none)
2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories? (~~yes~~/no)
3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact upon good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (~~minor/major~~/none)
4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups? (~~Yes~~/No)

Are there likely impacts on Section 75 Categories?

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the nine Section 75 categories?

- **Religious belief:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Political opinion:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Racial group:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Age:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Marital status:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Sexual orientation:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Men and women generally:**

Equality of opportunity. The proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy increases the length of time for which all eligible employees will

be paid contractual maternity pay (full pay) from 18 weeks to 26 weeks.

What is the level of impact? Major positive impact achieved as eligible staff will have maternity pay period extended.

- **Disability:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Dependants:**

Equality of opportunity. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the proposed revision to the Maternity Leave policy.

What is the level of impact? **None**

2. **Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?**

- **Religious belief:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Political opinion:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Racial group:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Age:**

This policy change affects people of all ages.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Marital status:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Sexual orientation:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Men and women generally:**

This policy change applies equally to people of all genders where they meet the eligibility criteria.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Disability:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

- **Dependants:**

This policy change applies equally to all staff regardless of Section 75 category.

Opportunity to better promote equality? **No**

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

- **Religious belief:**

Good relations between people of different religious beliefs. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Political opinion:**

Good relations between people of different political opinion. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

- **Racial group:**

Good relations between people of different racial groups. There is no evidence to suggest that any staff group will be differentially or negatively impacted by the policy change.

What is the level of impact? **None**

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups?

There is no opportunity to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial grouping within the policy change.

Opportunity to better promote good relations between groups? **No**

Additional considerations

Multiple Identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

The policy change applies equally to all eligible staff in NICS therefore no one will be differentially or negatively impacted through the policy.

None

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Alternatively there may already be policies in place which would mitigate any adverse impact identified.

Mitigation measures proposed:

Major positive impact achieved as eligible staff will have maternity pay period extended. No mitigation measures required.

Section C

DoF also has legislative obligations to meet under the [Disability Discrimination Order](#) and the [Human Rights Act](#) . The following questions relate to these two areas.

Consideration of Disability Duties

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity for DoF to better **promote positive attitudes** towards disabled people?

Explain your assessment in full

No.

The policy change applies equally to all eligible staff.

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity to actively **increase the participation** by disabled people in public life?

Explain your assessment in full

No, there is no impact, as detailed above.

Consideration of Human Rights

The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Articles 3 and 4 are classified as “absolute” rights ie the State can never withhold or take away these rights. All others are either “qualified” or “limited”. Further information is available via the following link

<http://www.nicshumanrightsguide.com/>

Indicate any potential *adverse impacts* that the policy / decision may have in relation to human rights issues.

	<u>Adverse Impact</u>	
	(delete as appropriate)	
Right to Life	Article 2	No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	Article 3	No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	Article 4	No
Right to liberty and security	Article 5	No
Right to a fair and public trial	Article 6	No
Right to no punishment without law	Article 7	No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	Article 8	No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	Article 9	No
Right to freedom of expression	Article 10	No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	Article 11	No
Right to marry and to found a family	Article 12	No

The prohibition of discrimination	Article 14	No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	Protocol 1 Article 1	No
Right to education	Protocol 1 Article 2	No
Right to free and secret elections	Protocol 1 Article 3	No

Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.

The revised Maternity Leave policy positively impacts Article 12 of the Human Rights Act which includes the right to found a family.

Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.

None

If you have identified any adverse impacts on human rights through this screening you must complete a Human Rights Impact Assessment: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/human-rights-impact-assessment-proforma>.

Monitoring Arrangements

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's [Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities \(July 2007\)](#):

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75MonitoringGuidance2007.pdf>

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

This policy is kept under review to ensure it takes account of any new legislation, case law, as well as any issues raised by HRConnect when applying the policy to individual cases.

A review of the policy will be commissioned by the end of April 2027.

Section D - Formal Record of Screening Decision

Title of Proposed Policy / Decision being screened:

Maternity Leave policy

I can confirm that the proposed policy / decision has been screened for (i) equality of opportunity, (ii) good relations disabilities duties and (iii) human rights issues

On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, I recommend that this policy / decision is –

* **Screened Out** – No EQIA necessary (no impacts)

Provide a brief note to explain how this decision was reached:

No Section 75 category groups were identified as being differentially or negatively impacted by the implementation of this policy.

Screening assessment completed by -

Name Frances Haire
Grade DP
Date 26 March 2025

And approved by –

Name Joan Fleetham
Grade Grade 7
Date 7 April 2025

Central Support Team Notified (15 April 2025)

Equality Contacts advised (May 2026)

Screening uploaded to DoF website (18 May 2026)