

Freedom of Information Policy

Section 75 Policy Screening

Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (*Appendix 1*)).

Introduction

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

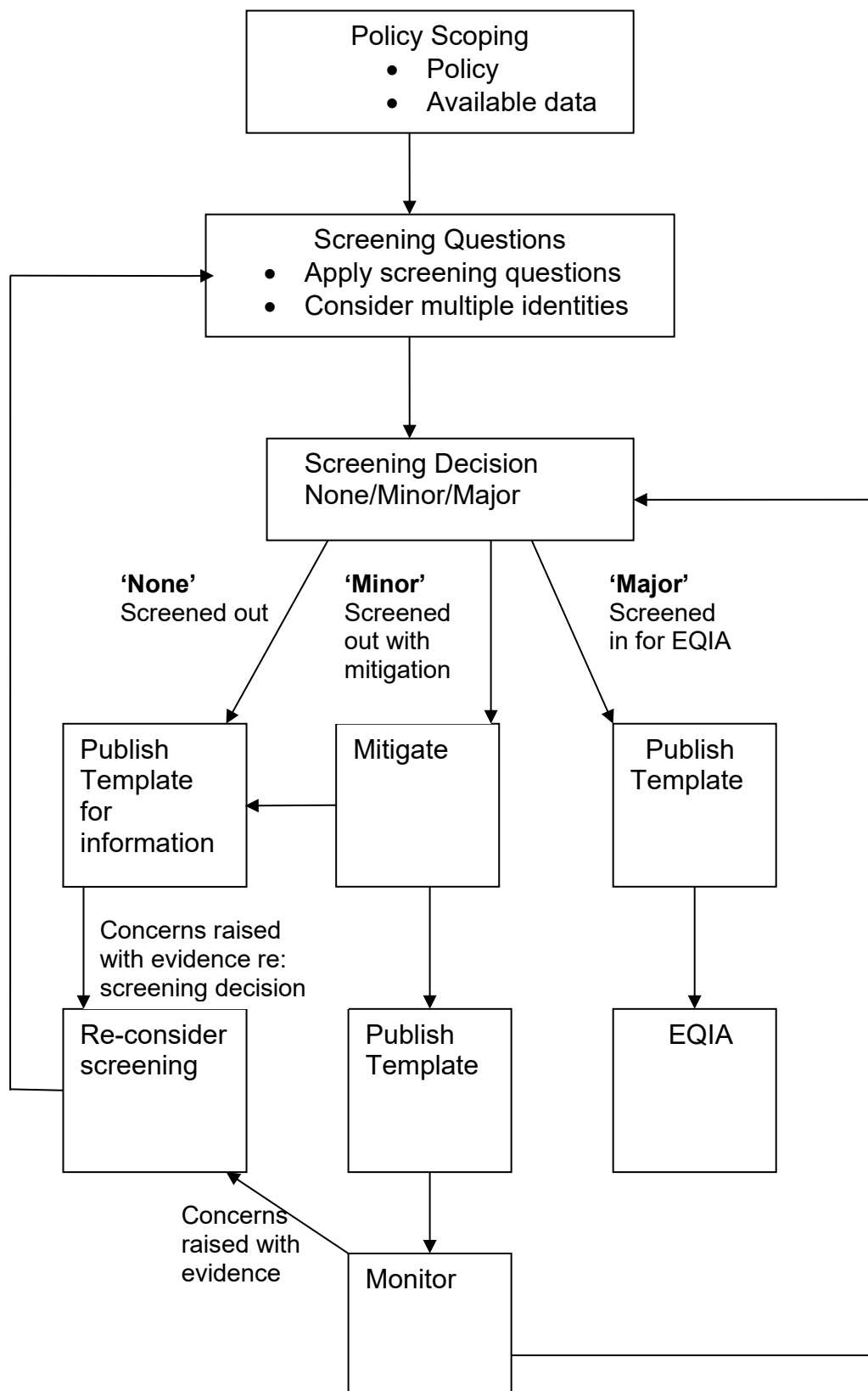
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

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

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

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

A screening flowchart is provided overleaf.



Part 1. Policy scoping

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

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

Information about the policy

Name of the policy: Freedom of Information Policy

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy? Existing, due for revision.

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

Ensure COPNI has a policy place setting out how COPNI will undertake its responsibilities as set out in the Freedom of Information (2000) Act.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? If so, explain how.

Not expected to benefit any Section 75 categories

Who initiated or wrote the policy? Head of Corporate Services

Who owns and who implements the policy? COPNI

Implementation factors

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

No.

Main stakeholders affected

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

Staff

service users

other public sector organisations

voluntary/community/trade unions

other - ARAC

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

- what are they? FOI Procedure,
Retention and Disposal Policy
Internet and Email Usage policy.
- who owns them? COPNI

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. The Commission has produced this guide to [signpost to S75 data](#).

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Religious belief evidence / information:

The Northern Ireland Census 2021 data on “religion of upbringing” and “current religion” revealed that 45.7% of our population were Catholic; 43.5% were Protestant, Other Christian or Christian related; and 1.5% were from other non-Christian religions.

Political Opinion evidence / information:

The Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey 2020 found that 35% of the Northern Ireland population describe themselves as Unionist, 19% as Nationalist and 42% as neither.

Racial Group evidence / information:

The Northern Ireland Census 2021 showed that 96.5% of the Northern Ireland population stated their ethnic origin to be “white”.

Age evidence / information:

According to NISRA the population of NI at the time of the 2021 census was 1,903,174 people. Census data according to age shows that 31.2% of the population was aged between 15-39; 32.4% between 40-64, and 17.2 % were 65 and above.

Marital Status evidence / information:

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.

Sexual Orientation evidence / information:

The 2021 Census reported the breakdown of the population in Northern Ireland in terms of sexual orientation as follows:- Heterosexual/Straight 90.04%; Gay/Lesbian 1.17%; Bisexual 0.75%; Other sexual orientation 0.17%; Prefer not to say 4.58%; and Not Stated 3.30

Men & Women generally evidence / information:

The 2021 Census found that 49.1% of the Northern Ireland population identified as male and 50.81% as female.

Disability evidence / information:

In the 2021 Census, 24.33% of the Northern Ireland population reported that their day to-day activities were limited because of a long-standing health problem or disability.

Dependants evidence / information:

The 2022 NISRA bulletin 'Census 2021 Population and household estimates for 2021' reported on a 'dependency ratio'. This is a measure of the relationship between the number of "dependents" and the number in the "working" population, which NISRA states is useful when assessing demographic change and can highlight trends in the need for social support. Two dependency ratios are considered. The first is the number of children (aged 0 to 14) for every 100 people of working age (aged 15 to 64). The second ratio is the number of people aged 65 and over for every 100 people of working age. Given that most children and people aged 65 and over are economically inactive, these ratios can be interpreted as the number of people 'dependent' on the working population. The bulletin estimates an increase of 3% in those 14 and under compared with 2011 and an increase of 25% in those 85+ compared to 2011

The 2021 Census noted that around 12% of all residents in NI provide some form of unpaid care each week.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

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

Religious belief evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Political Opinion evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Racial Group evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Age evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Marital Status evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Sexual Orientation evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Men & Women generally evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Disability evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Dependants evidence / information:

None in relation to this policy. This policy is intended to apply equally to all S75 groups.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;

- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

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

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

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women:** **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**: **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**: **None**

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

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

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

Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Racial Group - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Age - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Marital Status - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Sexual Orientation - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Men and Women generally - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Disability - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Dependants - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

N/A: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

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

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

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

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

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

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

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

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / **None**

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

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

Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

Racial Group - If Yes, provide details:
If No, provide reasons:

Not applicable: This policy is a policy that applies to all individuals equally.

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).

No.

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

N/A

Part 3. Screening decision

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

No impact on Section 75 categories – Compliance with the Freedom of Information (2000) Act is mandatory.

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

N/A.

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

N/A.

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

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.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

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

Not applicable. There is no need to mitigate this policy or produce an alternative as there is no impact identified on S75 categories.

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	
Social need	
Effect on people's daily lives	
Relevance to a public authority's functions	

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

If yes, please provide details.

N/A.

Part 4. Monitoring

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

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, 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.

Implementation of this policy will be monitored and reviewed in line with any changes in government policy and relevant legislation. A formal review will be undertaken 24 months from its effective date.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by	Position	Signed	Date
David Murray	Head of Corporate Services	David Murray	11/08/2025
Approved by	Position	Signed	Date
Siobhan Casey	Commissioner	Siobhan Casey	22/10/2025

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.