

# Programme for Government and Budget Recommendations



PFG PRIORITIES:

# FRAMEWORK

## > Introduction

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has set out its priority issues and recommendations that it wishes to see advanced through the Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) and Budget.

As set out in our [response](#) to proposals on the draft PfG framework, we welcome and strongly support the Executive's proposed focus on achieving outcomes; specifically given the potential that this offers to advance equality of opportunity for those who live with and experience inequalities and the absence of good relations.

We also support the Executive's approach to focus on the impact on people rather than solely on the actions taken within Government. Further, we support the emphasis on working across Government and on full engagement and co-design with stakeholders, as well as the proposed intention to 'report progress quickly and openly'.

We have set out specific recommendations that we wish to see advanced across the following areas: social attitudes; education; employment; social protection; accommodation and housing; health and social care; and public and political life.

We have also highlighted the need for equality law reform, to address gaps in equality data, to develop effective equality strategies; to ensure compliance with international human rights conventions; as well as for Departments and other public bodies to ensure, when preparing budget proposals, that they fulfil their statutory equality and good relations duties.

*"We consider that there is significant scope for the promotion of equality and good relations to be further embedded and mainstreamed across the PfG framework."*

[ECNI Response to consultation on draft PfG Framework, 2016](#)

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/pfg](http://www.equalityni.org/pfg)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# FRAMEWORK

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend that:

- there is a **clear commitment** in the PfG, underpinned by the inclusion of robust, outcome focused action measures, to addressing key inequalities experienced by the Section 75 equality groups, as well as to promoting good relations;
- promoting equality of opportunity and good relations are **cross-cutting themes** across all Government strategies, policy development and actions - including the PfG;
- all relevant PfG measures are not only tracked in aggregate but also for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 grounds.

## ➤ Promoting equality/good relations

We consider that equality of opportunity and good relations must be central to all public policy development and implementation, no less so at a time of reduced public spending.

Many key inequalities experienced by Section 75 equality groups remain persistent and hard to tackle. We consider that the PfG and Budget provide a key mechanism to maximise equality of opportunity and good relations outcomes.

It is essential that there is a high level, visible commitment in the PfG to addressing these inequalities and improving outcomes for Section 75 equality groups across a range of areas. There is also the need for urgent action to address poverty and social exclusion experienced by a range of equality groups.

Promoting equality of opportunity and good relations should be cross cutting themes across all Government strategies, policy development and actions – including the PfG framework and associated departmental delivery plans; as well as the Budget and key Strategies, such as the Economic, Social and Investment Strategies.

It is also essential that all relevant (those relating directly to people) PfG measures (and as such all relevant indicators and all outcomes) are not only tracked in aggregate but also tracked for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 grounds.

A clear commitment in the PfG to address key inequalities is not only consistent with the public sector equality duties on public bodies, but also existing objectives and outcomes set out in the Executive's equality and good relations strategies.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/pfg](http://www.equalityni.org/pfg)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# SOCIAL ATTITUDES

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- challenge prejudicial attitudes, behaviour and hate crime so as to ensure that workplaces, services, public spaces and communities are free from harassment and/or discrimination across the equality grounds.

*33% of respondents said they had been subjected to unfair treatment because they belonged to a particular group.*

*Negative attitudes existed towards Travellers (30%), transgender persons (22%), and Eastern European migrant workers (21%).*

**ECNI Equality Awareness Survey 2011, 2012**

## > Prejudicial attitudes / hate crime

The Commission has highlighted the need to tackle prejudicial attitudes, behaviour and hate crime.

It is essential that steps are taken to ensure that workplaces, services, public spaces and communities are free from harassment and/or discrimination across the equality grounds.

This includes action to address sectarianism and racism within the workplace; tackle the significant attitudinal barriers to employment for people with disabilities; to challenge negative attitudes towards Irish Travellers, Eastern European migrant workers and other minority ethnic individuals, as well as lesbian, gay and bisexual people and trans individuals.

Further, it includes action aimed at tackling hate crime experienced by Section 75 equality groups, including sectarian, racist, homophobic, transphobic, and disability hate crime. It also involves challenging gender stereotypes and gender based violence.

**Read more: [www.equalityni.org/SocialAttitudes](http://www.equalityni.org/SocialAttitudes)**



PFG PRIORITIES:

# EDUCATION

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- ensure a move to a system of education which routinely teaches all pupils together via a shared curriculum in shared classes, and where sharing impacts meaningfully and substantively on every learner;
- tackle prejudice based bullying; address gender stereotyping in education; and remove the barriers facing looked after children and young carers;
- address education inequalities, including those experienced by Irish Travellers; those entitled to free school meals, particularly boys, notably Protestant boys; and children/young people with disabilities;
- mainstream equality in education, including in the curriculum, teacher training and the policies / practices of schools and wider education bodies.

## > Educational inequalities

The Commission is of the view that every child should have access to a good quality school experience, can reach their full potential and that schools promote the inclusion and participation of all.

We consider that all children and young people must be valued equally and believe that they should be allowed the opportunity to develop to their full potential. The role of the education system should be to foster and facilitate that development.

Further, we consider that sharing in education, across the full range of equality grounds has the potential to improve educational access and attainment for pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities. We have also highlighted the need to mainstream equality in education, including in the curriculum, teacher training and the policies/practices of schools and wider education bodies.

We have also highlighted that bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools is a persistent problem. We have raised concerns about the bullying of, for example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, minority ethnic, disabled, and trans pupils in schools. We have called for steps to be taken to tackle prejudice-based bullying in schools and improve monitoring and recording of these incidents.

**Read more:** [www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education](http://www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education)



## PFG PRIORITIES:



We have also drawn attention to the non-attendance, drop-out rates and poor educational outcomes experienced by Irish Travellers.

We have recommended measures to address the educational underachievement of those entitled to free school meals, particularly boys, notably Protestant boys; looked after children and young people, young carers and children and young people with disabilities. In addition, we have highlighted the fact that fewer boys than girls progress to higher education.

Further, there is a need for steps to be taken to address the factors that inhibit girls' life experiences, such as gender stereotyping as regards subject choice, the curriculum and careers guidance.

*“Many inequalities remain persistent and hard to tackle, and there are a number of new and emerging inequalities that are impacting on some of the equality groups.”*

**ECNI draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland, 2015**

**Read more:** [www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education](http://www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# EMPLOYMENT INEQUALITIES

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- support women's economic participation, including through access to appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare;
- address the exploitation and forced labour of migrant workers and the concentration of some minority ethnic workers in low paid employment;
- support people with disabilities to access and remain in the workplace;
- ensure training and programmes to enable people to get into or stay in work that are accessible and inclusive for all.

## > Employment inequalities

The Commission has highlighted the need to address inequalities in employment experienced by Section 75 groups.

The removal of barriers to work, including those experienced by women, people with disabilities, older people and minority ethnic workers, will contribute to realising Northern Ireland's full economic potential with improved employment opportunities for all.

A specific focus for the Commission is economic independence, specifically mindful of the needs of women. We have highlighted that the availability of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision is a fundamental part of mothers entering, remaining and progressing in work.

We have also raised the need to promote flexible working practices and to encourage men to share responsibility for childcare; as well as to address the concentration of women in part time, low paid work and to mitigate the impact of rebalancing the economy.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/Employment](http://www.equalityni.org/Employment)





## PFG PRIORITIES:

We recommend action to reduce discrimination in employment, including due to pregnancy and maternity and disability. There is clear evidence of the economic exclusion of people with disabilities. People with disabilities face barriers to employment and require support in terms of accessing and remaining in the workplace.

Further, we recommend support for initiatives aimed at tackling the exploitation of migrant workers; reducing ethnic minority disadvantage in employment; raising awareness of the rights of migrant workers; and maximising migrant workers access to the labour market.

*The majority of disability discrimination enquiries to the Commission relate to employment (71%) and almost 20% of sex discrimination enquiries relate to pregnancy and maternity.*

**ECNI Discrimination Enquiries Statistics  
2015-2016<sup>1</sup>**

*“The issue of childcare needs to become a higher priority for policymakers, and the indispensable role of childcare in getting parents into employment needs greater acknowledgement.”*

**Research: Childcare: Maximising the economic participation of women, 2013<sup>2</sup>**

- 1 *Equality Commission Discrimination Enquiries Statistics 2015-2016*. Statistics relate to discrimination enquiries received by the Equality Commission between 1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016.
- 2 McQuaid R, Graham H, Shapira M (2013) *Childcare: Maximising the economic participation of women*, commissioned by Equality Commission.

**Read more: [www.equalityni.org/Employment](http://www.equalityni.org/Employment)**



PFG PRIORITIES:

# SOCIAL PROTECTION

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- to protect the most vulnerable from the adverse impact of welfare reform, particularly mindful of the impact on people with disabilities and women, and the barriers experienced by minority ethnic communities (including asylum seekers and refugees);
- to identify/commit to specific measures which will mitigate the adverse impact of welfare reform, or any alternate policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

## ➤ Accessing social protection

The Commission has highlighted the need to protect the most vulnerable from the adverse impact of welfare reform. We have, for example, raised concerns about the potential impact of welfare reform proposals on people with disabilities and women.

We have called for steps to identify and commit to specific measures which will mitigate the adverse impact of welfare reform on the promotion of equality of opportunity, or any alternate policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity. We note recent proposals designed to mitigate the impact of some aspects of the welfare reform proposals<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, while many of the top priorities for older people are income related, older people are also shown not to fully access benefits and take up programmes.

Further, minority ethnic communities, including asylum seekers and refugees, can also experience barriers to accessing social protection and services.

We recommend that, as part of a broader Refugee Integration Strategy, the Executive takes action to address the problems experienced by asylum seekers during transition from one form of public support to another; ensures that asylum seekers receive appropriate support from arrival until voluntary departure or compulsory removal from the UK; and assesses the barriers faced by asylum seekers and refugees in accessing benefits, including the accessibility of services.

3 E.Evason (2016) *Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report*.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/WelfareReform](http://www.equalityni.org/WelfareReform)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# ACCOMMODATION AND HOUSING

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- develop safe, shared communities based on equality, dignity and respect;
- ensure that everyone has access to a safe, secure home and enjoys the right to independent living, including for people with disabilities and older people;
- address the housing needs of particular equality groups, such as Irish Travellers, and minority ethnic communities (including migrant workers and refugees).

## > Inequalities in accommodation and housing

The Commission recommends actions designed to develop safe, shared communities based on equality, dignity and respect. Shared communities should include shared housing, as well as shared education, and shopping and facilities, such as leisure facilities.

There is a need to eradicate prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes in order to create communities that are safe for all, removing discrimination, prejudice and hate crime.

Further, there is a need to ensure that everyone has access to a safe, secure home and enjoys the right to independent living, including for people with disabilities and older people.

We also recommend actions to address the needs of particular equality groups, such as Irish Travellers, minority ethnic communities (including migrant workers and refugees), who experience insecurity of tenure and overcrowding, and poorer conditions.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/Communities](http://www.equalityni.org/Communities)





## PFG PRIORITIES:

Research, Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup> (2015), has identified, for example, that access to quality transit and settled sites for Irish Travellers is limited, with some experiencing a lack of basic amenities; people with a learning disability are not always afforded an opportunity to live independently; people with disabilities of all ages experience barriers to obtaining housing adaptations that meet their disability-related needs; and older people are more likely than other age groups to live in poor housing conditions.

It also highlighted concerns as regards migrant workers in tied accommodation, where conditions often poor and overcrowded.

Further, we recommend that community planning mechanisms, including the implementation of community plans by local councils, should ensure that equality and good relations are mainstreamed in public policy.

*Older people are more likely to live in non-decent homes.*

ECNI draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities 2016<sup>5</sup>.

- 4 Wallace A (June 2015), Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland commissioned by Equality Commission.
- 5 Households with an older reference person, those aged 60 years old or older, are more likely to live in non-decent home. See ECNI (2016), draft Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/Communities](http://www.equalityni.org/Communities)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- identify and remove barriers to health and social care and well being experienced by particular Section 75 equality groups, including older people; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; trans people; Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic communities; and people with disabilities;
- ensure investment in health care to address the specific needs of equality groups, including the health care needs of people with disabilities, and young people's mental health needs.

## > Health and social care inequalities

Health and social care is fundamental to people's quality of life and general well being. A number of factors can contribute to health inequalities including socio-economic and environmental circumstances; lifestyle and health behaviour; and access to effective health and social care.

The Commission has highlighted barriers to accessing health and social care, experienced by particular Section 75 equality groups, such as older people; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; trans people; Irish Travellers and other minority ethnic communities. These include barriers relating to prejudice, information, language, culture and, particularly for rural people, lack or affordability of transport.

We have also highlighted the need to ensure investment in health care to address the specific needs of equality groups; for example, people with disabilities, including the sexual health and maternity needs of women with disabilities; as well as young people's mental health needs and to address the high suicide rates among men, Irish Travellers, and young people.

We have raised concerns regarding barriers to accessing health and social care, including those faced by children and young people in accessing age-appropriate health care; as well as ageist attitudes experienced by older people, and stereotypes that portray older people as cared for, rather than care givers. Further, we have called for a full consultation on abortion law in Northern Ireland. There is also the need to ensure the collection by the Department of Health, of system wide data across the Section 75 grounds; and that appropriate account is taken of people's multiple identities.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/Health](http://www.equalityni.org/Health)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# PUBLIC / POLITICAL LIFE

## > Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- increase the participation of women in political/public life and decision making, including peacebuilding;
- promote the participation of other under-represented Section 75 groups in public life, including people with disabilities; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; older people; and minority ethnic communities.

*“The under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland is a serious issue which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.”*

[AER Committee, Report on Women in Politics and the NI Assembly, 2015](#)

## > Participation in public/political life

In order to deliver the PFG, it is necessary to ensure that all people and perspectives are represented and can participate equally; whether in consultation on public policy, in economic, political or public life and decision making, including peace building.

The Commission has highlighted the need to promote the participation of under-represented Section 75 groups in public and political life and decision making, including through ensuring their meaningful and active engagement in policy decision making.

For example, we have raised the need to take measures, including temporary special measures, to increase women's participation in politics, public life and decision making, including peacebuilding.

We have also raised concerns about the under-representation of people with disabilities in public life, and have called for steps, in furtherance of the disability duties on public bodies, to promote their participation in public life. Further, action is required to encourage the visibility and participation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, older people and minority ethnic people in public life.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/PublicLife](http://www.equalityni.org/PublicLife)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# LAW REFORM

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- reform and strengthen equality law across a number of equality grounds; including age (as regards the provision of goods, facilities and services); race; disability; sex; fair employment; and sexual orientation;
- reform wider areas of the law that impact on Section 75 equality groups.

*“People of all ages should have protection against discrimination on the grounds of age when accessing goods and services.”*

**ECNI: Strengthening Protection for Children and Young People, 2013.**

## ➤ Equality law reform

The Commission is of the view that the introduction of single equality legislation would best harmonise and simplify the protections available in Northern Ireland. It is of note that equality legislation in other parts of the UK has already been streamlined and strengthened through the introduction of single equality legislation – namely the Equality Act 2010.

In the absence of single equality legislation, we recommend that the PFG contains a clear timetabled commitment to strengthen existing legislation in a number of key areas.

These include reform of:

- age discrimination legislation (in the provision of goods, facilities and services, relating to all ages);
- race equality legislation;
- disability discrimination legislation;
- sex equality legislation (as regards public functions);
- fair employment legislation (as regards the exception on recruitment of teachers and fair employment monitoring);
- sexual orientation equality law.

It also includes wider changes to the law that impact on Section 75 groups; for example, changes to law so as to permit same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland.

Reforming, strengthening and updating Northern Ireland equality law will help tackle inequalities, ensure greater harmonisation and consistency across the equality legislation, and address the significant gaps in protection between equality law in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/LawReform](http://www.equalityni.org/LawReform)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# EQUALITY DATA

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- address the key gaps in equality data, including on the grounds of gender identity, sexual orientation, and race;
- rectify the lack of data disaggregation in relation to ethnicity, disability and gender.

*“It is also essential that all relevant PFG measures ... are not only tracked in aggregate but also tracked for the impact on individuals from each of the Section 75 grounds.”*

[ECNI Response to the Executive’s consultation on a draft Programme for Government Framework 2016](#)

## ➤ Gaps in equality data

The Commission has highlighted the lack of specific data across a number of themes in relation to a range of equality grounds, including gender identity, sexual orientation, and race; as well as multiple identity. It has also highlighted the lack of data disaggregation in relation to some equality grounds, such as ethnicity, disability and gender.

The PFG should include actions, particularly by Departments and other public bodies, to address key gaps in equality data – including to ensure that data is available across the full range of equality grounds, and in respect of people’s multiple identities.

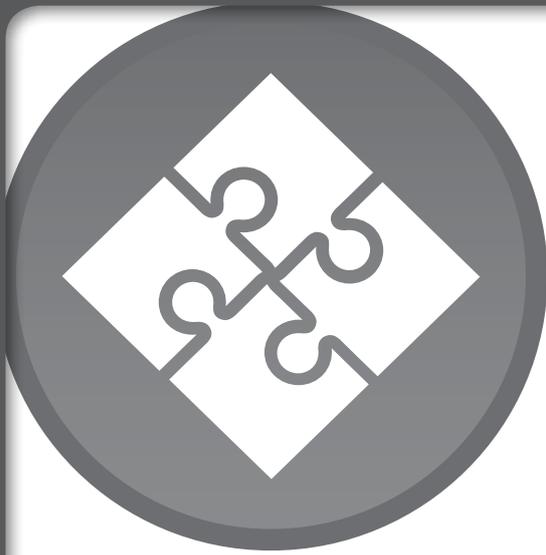
The absence of key equality data means that it is difficult for the Executive, Departments and others to assess the nature and extent of key inequalities, as well as to track progress in achieving agreed equality and good relations outcomes.

For example, research<sup>6</sup> into educational inequalities in Northern Ireland has highlighted that the lack of available and/or robust data relating to several equality groups, as regards educational access, attainment, progression and destinations, hinders progress being made on redressing the educational inequalities they may face.

6 Burns, S., Leitch, R. and Hughes, J. (2015) *Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland* commissioned by Equality Commission

Read more: [www.equalityni.org/EqualityData](http://www.equalityni.org/EqualityData)





PfG PRIORITIES:

# EQUALITY STRATEGIES

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- ensure effective equality/ good relations strategies and action plans are implemented and updated across the full range of anti-discrimination grounds;
- set out a timetabled commitment to take this key work forward- including as regards a Gender Equality Strategy; a Racial Equality Strategy; a Disability Strategy; a Sexual Orientation Strategy; a Children and Young Person's Strategy; an Active Ageing Strategy, as well as a Strategy to promote good relations (*Together: Building a United Community: TBUC*).

*“The publication of a ... comprehensive Sexual Orientation Strategy will send a strong statement of the Executive’s commitment to promoting equality for LGB people.”*

**ECNI Promoting Sexual Orientation Equality: Priorities and Recommendations 2013**

## ➤ Effective equality and good relations strategies

The Commission considers that further actions to address key inequalities include the need to ensure that effective equality and good relations strategies and associated action plans are in place, implemented and reviewed across a range of equality grounds.

These include a Gender Equality Strategy, a Racial Equality Strategy, a Disability Strategy, a Children and Young People's Strategy, a Sexual Orientation Strategy, an Active Ageing Strategy, and a strategy to advance equality of opportunity and good relations on the grounds of religion and political opinion (*Together: Building a United Community*).

We recommend that the PfG includes a timetabled commitment to take this key work forward. Departments will be aware of the importance of developing and implementing effective equality and good relations strategies that set out clear visions, strategic aims and objectives and outcomes and that are underpinned by robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

It is however clear that, despite their importance, there have been significant delays in the development of some key equality strategies, including, for example, the Sexual Orientation Strategy.

**Read more:** [www.equalityni.org/addressinginequality](http://www.equalityni.org/addressinginequality)



PFG PRIORITIES:

# INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

## ➤ Recommendations

We recommend actions to:

- address key shortfalls in Northern Ireland so as to ensure compliance with obligations under international human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

*“Ultimately, the research has identified a range of shortfalls in delivery in Northern Ireland relative to the UNCRPD.”*

**Research: Bryne B, et al, Shortfalls in public policy and programme delivery in Northern Ireland relative to the Articles of UNCRPD, 2014.**

## ➤ International human rights obligations

The Commission is of the view that the PFG should include clear commitments to address key gaps in policies and programmes in Northern Ireland, so as to ensure compliance with the UK Government's obligations under international human rights conventions. There should also be clear commitments to ensure comprehensive input into State Party submissions relating to such conventions.

These conventions include the UNCRPD, as well as other international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD); the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

We have, for example, highlighted that there are key gaps, in terms of policies and programmes, aligned to a number of UNCRPD Articles that need addressed<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, in our [CEDAW Shadow Report](#) (2013), we highlighted a range of areas that we considered needed addressed with regards to women's equality in Northern Ireland. Significantly, in its most recent Concluding Observations (2013), the UN CEDAW Committee expressed concerns about the implementation of CEDAW across the UK. The Committee also included specific recommendations relating to Northern Ireland.

Further, in our [FCNM Shadow Report](#) (2016) we raised the importance of addressing inconsistencies in the race equality legislation and gaps in protection; our proposals for reform of the fair employment legislation; and the need to address inequalities faced by migrant workers.

<sup>7</sup> IMNI (ECNI, NIHRC) (2014) [UNCRPD Jurisdictional 'Parallel' Report on Implementation in Northern Ireland](#), (working paper).

**Read more:** [www.equalityni.org/addressinginequality](http://www.equalityni.org/addressinginequality)



# BUDGET



## Key points

- In the preparation of budget proposals, Departments and other public authorities should ensure that they fulfil their statutory equality and good relations duties.
- The Commission has set out in guidance how Section 75 duties and equality scheme commitments apply to the budget processes. Equality scheme arrangements and tools - i.e. screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA) - provide a means for Departments and other public authorities to assess the likely impacts of the budget proposals.

*Applying equality scheme arrangements for assessments to the full range of decisions will ensure transparent and evidence-based decisions.*

**[ECNI Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide 2015](#)**

## Equality/ good relations requirements

Meeting equality and good relations requirements in developing and delivering the PfG and Budget requires leadership and commitment at the highest levels and throughout public policy making.

We have set out in [guidance](#)<sup>8</sup> (2015) how Section 75 duties and equality scheme commitments apply to the budget processes. As highlighted in this guidance, in the preparation of budget proposals, Departments and other public authorities should ensure that they fulfil their statutory equality and good relations duties.

Through its functions, the Department of Finance, must comply with the statutory equality duties, and apply its equality scheme arrangements. In addition, Departments and other public authorities have functional responsibility not only for contributing to the preparation of budget proposals, but also the allocation of individual budget settlements. Similarly, they must fulfil these functions and make decisions having given the required consideration under the statutory equality duties.

<sup>8</sup> Equality Commission (2015) [Section 75 and Budgets: a short guide](#),

**Read more:** [www.equalityni.org/PublicAuthorities](http://www.equalityni.org/PublicAuthorities)





Through application of their equality scheme arrangements, specifically through the methodologies for assessing the likely impacts of the budget proposals (ie through the tools of screening and equality impact assessment (EQIA)), Departments and other public bodies will be able to fulfil their statutory equality duties.

Further, both screening and EQIA methodologies prompt for the identification of mitigation and alternative policies. In circumstances of budget reductions, measures to mitigate adverse impacts and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality will be important for consideration.

Decisions to change, reduce or withdraw services, particularly in times of budget reduction, whether on a temporary, interim or pilot basis, should be treated as “policies” for the purposes of equality scheme commitments.

We recommend that early options are presented with screening or that options appraisal has incorporated screening. We also recommend that Departments and other public bodies embed equality of opportunity and good relations in their procurement practices.

As highlighted in good practice [guidance](#)<sup>9</sup>, equality of opportunity must be considered at the outset of any procurement process and then throughout the life of the project, with particular attention being given to decision-making moments.

*“...it is vital that all levels of government adopt an equality responsive approach to budgeting making as a means of fulfilling Section 75 duties.”*

**Expert paper: Quinn S, [Equality Responsive Budgeting 2013](#)**

9 Equality Commission, DFP (2008) [Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement.](#)

**Read more: [www.equalityni.org/PublicAuthorities](http://www.equalityni.org/PublicAuthorities)**





For further information: [www.equalityni.org/pfg](http://www.equalityni.org/pfg)

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