



Corporate Governance Branch
The Executive Office
Block B5
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SR

8th November 2024

Dear Corporate Governance Branch,

Due to pressure of time and workload we are unable to complete a full response to The Executive Office's Budget Allocation for 2024-25 Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). We wish to fully endorse the Women's Policy Group response (of which we are a member).

Therefore, please accept this letter as our response highlighting the following concerns and calling on The Executive Office to fully consider the detail of the Women's Policy Group response:

- We are concerned about about The Executive Office's budget shortfall and the proposed options to reduce spending outlined in the EQIA. It is clear that this "*most challenging budget in recent history*" will impact on service delivery which is likely to have adverse impacts across the Section 75 groups. The Executive Office has on the whole identified the adverse impacts within the EQIA. We welcome the fact that it acknowledges that women, people with a disability, older and young people may be more impacted by the budget and are likely to experience multiple adverse impacts.
- We are particularly concerned that the budget shortfall would limit the ambitions of the **Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Framework**. This includes funding for specialist services for victims and survivors of VAWG, for example, Rape Crisis, which is a priority area within the framework "*Specialist services for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls are available, effective, sustainable, and accessible.*"
- We are pleased to see additional allocations to **Good Relations** funding this year which will enable further on-the-ground delivery. However, this follows cuts to this funding in the previous year. There is a clear need for investment in this area to provide long term solutions to the systemic issues of

segregation and reducing the cost of division as outlined in the EQIA. While it is positive to see some restoration of this funding there have still been reductions in funding for this work. There is still much to be done in this area and under investment will simply shift the burden to other Departments such as Justice.

- We support the following comment from the Women’s Policy Group that overall and in contrast to the 2023-24 Budget EQIA: *“this document is poorly laid out such that it is difficult to ascertain what decisions have actually been made with regards to funding key work and ALBs. This is very disappointing, and if organisations within the Community and Voluntary Sector who know well how to analyse and respond to these documents find it difficult, certainly members of the public will, too.”*
- We support the concerns raised by our colleagues in the Women’s Policy Group that Departments continue to ask the community and voluntary sector to identify **mitigations** to their budget proposals. This is not the role of the sector but is the responsibility of the Departments themselves. The purpose of EQIAs is for Departments to consider the potential impacts on Section 75 groups, to not only identify the disproportionate impacts but to identify ways of mitigating against them and seeking opportunities to promote equality for these protected groups.
- In terms of the **consideration of available data and research** we note that the Department has acknowledged that there is not enough sufficient robust data to determine impact on all Section 75 groups. We would like to have seen the Department expand the range of data and research they have considered to include research from the community and voluntary sector. This research provides equally important data at community level which can give important insights into the equality impacts of Government policy. We would also suggest that the full suite of Social Inclusion Strategies are included here as they apply to the whole of the Executive and are cross-departmental. We therefore recommend that The Executive Office includes the following:
 - Report from the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel, published by the Department for Communities, March 2021
[Report from the Gender Equality Strategy Expert Advisory Panel | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
 - Report from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel, published by the Department for Communities, March 2021
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/report-anti-poverty-strategy-expert-advisory-panel>
 - Report from the Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel, published by the Department for Communities, March 2021
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/report-disability-strategy-expert-advisory-panel#:~:text=The%20Disability%20Strategy%20Expert%20Advisory%20Panel%20was%20appointed%20in%20October,it%20should%20seek%20to%20address>
 - Report from the Sexual Orientation Strategy Expert Advisory Panel, published by the Department for Communities, March 2021

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/report-sexual-orientation-strategy-expert-advisory-panel>

- Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland: NI Women's Policy Group Research Findings, April 2022
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WPG-VAWG-Research-Report.pdf>
- Violence Against Disabled Women and Girls in Northern Ireland: NI Women's Policy Group Research Findings, August 2022
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Violence-Against-Disabled-Women-Girls-WPG-Research-Briefing.pdf>
- Women's Policy Group Primary Research: 'After Violence: Attitudes and Reporting VAWG', September 2023
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AfterViolenceWPGPrimaryResearch.pdf>
- After Violence: Attitudes and Reporting Violence Against Women and Girls, Women's Policy Group NI Primary Research Findings
<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/After-Violence-WPG-Research-Report.pdf>
- "When you know what they are capable of": Paramilitary-related Gendered Coercive Control, September 2024
<https://foylewomensaid.org/when-you-know-what-they-are-capable-of-paramilitary-related-gendered-coercive-control/>
- Call for evidence on the effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland, Women's Regional Consortium submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, May 2022
<https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Womens-Regional-Consortium-response-to-NI-Affairs-Committee-Call-for-Evidence-on-Paramilitaries.pdf>
- This consultation was issued on 15th August 2024 with interested parties encouraged to respond by 13th September 2024 to inform the allocation of funds. This first phase leaves just four weeks to respond. **We are opposed to the two-phase approach to consultation.** While the consultation states a final closing date of 8th November 2024 in reality organisations need to respond by 13th September in order to have any influence over the allocation of funds. We suggest that given the nature and importance of this consultation that the deadline should have been longer to enable genuine and meaningful consultation.
- We also note that section 3.8 of The Executive Office's Equality Scheme states that: "*The consultation period for equality issues will normally last for twelve weeks to allow adequate time for consultees to respond.*"¹
- We refer the Department to the guidance on consulting with women produced by Women's Regional Consortium members WRDA.² This guidance contains five top tips based on the many years of experience that women's groups have in promoting women's participation in public policy making.

¹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/teo-equality-scheme-2024-2029.pdf>

² Women at the Heart of Public Consultation, A guide for Public Authorities and Women's Organisations, WRDA, November 2017
https://wrda.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/WRDA_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf

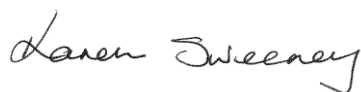
- The EQIA states that “*The Executive Office is not currently undertaking any gender-based budgeting pilots*” in the consideration of women’s issues and gender issues. We support the following statement on **Gender Budgeting** from our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Women’s Budget Group: “*Gender budgeting is good budgeting; it encourages greater transparency of government processes, more in-depth assessments of how policies and budgets affect constituents and closer cooperation between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. It encourages a more targeted approach to the spending of public money, which will improve policy outcomes. Implementing gender budgeting mechanisms would provide decision-makers with the tools to recognise and mitigate gendered economic impacts and promote gender equality. Whilst political crises that affect budget processes are outside the control of departmental officials, strategically embedding gender budgeting measures will create a firewall to prevent such disproportionate disadvantages in future.*”
- We welcome the fact that a **Rural Needs Assessment** and a **Children’s Rights Impact Assessment** have been carried out this year (these were not carried out for the 2023-24 Budget EQIA).

This response has been undertaken collaboratively by the Women’s Regional Consortium and endorsed by the following Women’s Centres:

Ballybeen Women’s Centre
 Chrysalis Women’s Centre, Craigavon
 First Steps Women’s Centre,
 Dungannon
 Footprints Women’s Centre
 Greenway Women’s Centre, Belfast
 Strathfoyle Women’s Activity Group

Women’s Centre Derry
 Waterside Women’s Centre
 Windsor Women’s Centre
 Falls Women’s Centre
 Shankill Women’s Centre
 Kilcooley Women’s Centre
 ATLAS Women’s Centre, Lisburn

Kind Regards



Karen Sweeney
 Director, WSN