



The
Executive Office

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***Report and Recommendations on
the Outcomes of the Children's
Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)
and Rural Needs Impact
Assessment (RNIA) on the
Executive Office's Spending Plans
for 2023-2024***

***(Final CRIA and RNIA Consultation
Outcomes as at 2 October 2023)***

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Conclusions and Mitigations from the Consultation

The Executive Office (TEO) undertook a consultation on the [Children's Rights Impact Assessment \(CRIA\) and Rural Need Impact Assessment \(RNIA\) for the Executive Office's Spending Plans for 2023-24](#). The 12-week period of consultation opened on 10 July 2023 and ended on 02 October 2023. Three CRIA and three RNIA responses were received. Whilst the persuasiveness of the consultation responses towards policy recommendations is limited by the relatively small number of responses received, final conclusions to the consultation are documented herein.

Responses to the consultation generally recognised that budget decisions are difficult, as was the case for responses to the consultation for the related [Equality Impact Assessment \(EQIA\)](#). TEO possesses limited options for delivering savings. It was highlighted that standard percentage reductions across all business areas and Arm's Length Bodies would potentially disproportionately affect some Section 75 groups, as well as children and young people and rural residents.

Overall, given the level of required savings and profile of expenditure, there does not appear to be a clear alternative to the proposed prioritisation of blocks of funding. In taking individual decisions within these blocks, however, TEO has asked business areas to take into account the vulnerability of young people, rural networks and programmes highlighted in the responses. TEO has taken on board the comments received during the EQIA, CRIA and RNIA process and will continue to use them throughout the financial year to develop further mitigations where possible, as well as to inform the development of spending plans should additional funding become available.

Separate narrative detailing the steps that TEO is currently taking, and plans to take in the future, in order to address the comments made by consultees during the CRIA and RNIA consultation process is included at end of each of each section. This also includes how TEO is addressing any points made by Section 75 groups more generally during the main EQIA consultation.

The issue raised in relation to the cross-cutting impact of reductions by Departments to live within constrained budgets is being taken forward by the Department for Finance.

TEO would like to thank those stakeholders who have contributed to the consultation process. We realise this is challenging environment in which all TEO's stakeholders have been forced to operate. The decisions on which we have consulted will not be taken lightly.

Departmental Priorities

On TEO's assessment of choices to live within the budget allocation, the consensus was an acknowledgement that TEO had few options available. Some did question, however, the allocation of District Council Good Relations Programme (DCGRP) funding and the mitigations required to ensure equitable access to good relations programming.

- **TEO have needed to award programme funding where possible, to avoid further uncertainty and to ensure that resources are deployed on the ground as soon as possible.**
- **While TEO does not have other options for reductions, the Department will keep this under review throughout the year and factor into decisions that may be required – particularly if additional resource becomes available.**
- **TEO fully acknowledges the points made on the impact on District Council Good Relations Programme (DCGRP) and on the Central Good Relations Fund (CGRF). TEO will seek to bid for additional funding should the opportunity arise and will further monitor the impact while continuing to work closely with councils.**

Data

Consultees to the main EQIA consultation highlighted the lack of equality data analysed. This was recognised by the Department within the main consultation paper: "there is not sufficient robust data to determine impact on all Section 75 groups".

It was further highlighted by one respondent that there was no evidence presented by TEO to suggest that children and young people's views were included in the decision-making process behind the draft TEO budget for 2023/24. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children should be involved in decisions that affect them and those views should be taken seriously and acted upon.

With regards to the RNIA and CRIA it was also suggested in responses that TEO should meet directly with community groups in order to better understand the views of stakeholders and for groups to share reflections for future RNIA and CRIA consultations. TEO management have met stakeholders such as the Rural Needs Network and the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Office (NICCY), as well as the Equality Commission NI. The purpose of these meetings was to allow for further reflection on the consultation process and to discuss further ways for the collection of stakeholder inputs from across society.

Executive Summary

The consultation for both the CRIA and the RNIA launched on 10 July 2023 and were published on the TEO website at:

[Consultation on the Children's Rights Impact Assessment and Rural Need Impact Assessment for the Executive Office's Spending Plans for 2023-24](#)

Responses received during between 10 July 2023 until the close of the consultation on 02 October 2023 will be used going forward to consider further mitigation measures, to inform in-year budget reallocation processes and to direct any additional funding (or further reductions) that emerge over the course of the financial year.

Three responses were submitted in response to the RNIA consultation process and three responses were received in response to the CRIA consultation process. This is significantly lower than the 85 responses received for the corresponding EQIA consultation. Responses to the RNIA consultation were submitted by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (ANBC), the Rural Community Network (RCN) and by Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC).

Responses to the CRIA consultation were submitted by Sinn Féin, the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and by Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC). Many respondents chose not to address the consultation questions directly, but instead wrote expressing dissatisfaction with the potential impact of changes in budget allocations on rural groups or children and young people.

This paper focuses on the broad themes emerging from all responses received from the consultation process which closed on 02 October 2023. It is noted that with an increased perspicuity of findings that comes from limited submissions, reliability and impartiality may be skewed from the lack of responses received during the consultation period.

The consultation overviews and the themes emerging from responses are set out in this document. The document also addresses what TEO is doing presently, and what it plans to do the future, in order to address themes emerging from the consultations.

Background to the Executive Office

The Executive Office was established in May 2016 following the restructuring of Northern Ireland government departments. Although it replaced the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, a number of the responsibilities relating to specific aspects of equality transferred to other departments.

Policy Aims and Objective of this Report

The objective of this report is to summarise the comments and suggestions provided in relation to the TEO consultations on the [‘Children’s Rights Impact Assessment \(CRIA\) and Rural Need Impact Assessment \(RNIA\) for the Executive Office’s Spending Plans for 2023-24’](#).

Public Interest Duties

Some of the decisions relating to budget allocation will fall to the Permanent Secretary of the Executive Office under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022. Other decisions are of a kind normally reserved for a Minister. The guidance states:

“Some decisions should not be taken by civil servants without the direction of elected Ministers. NI departments should therefore first consider the public interest of having elected Ministers taking and guiding decisions.”

At the same time, the Permanent Secretary, as Accounting Officer, is under a legal obligation to ensure the Department does not overspend and end up in an ‘Excess Vote’ position.

Unfortunately, this will mean that some difficult decisions will need to be taken by officials.

It is important to stress that the recommendations contained in the CRIA or RNIA (or the EQIA) are not recommendations that would be made by officials under normal circumstances. Rather, they are actions required as a consequence of an extremely constrained budget allocation.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 requires public authorities to have ‘due regard’ to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy, strategy or plan and when designing or delivering a public service.

Where a public authority chooses not to undertake a Rural Needs Impact Assessment it is required to have a sound rationale for departing from the guidance and ensure that when adopting the alternative approach it fulfils the ‘due regard of rural needs’ duty.

Three responses were received to the RNIA. Responses to TEO’s RNIA consultation focused on the nature of budget proposals by TEO, the downstream effects on Good Relations funding, and the possibility of this having adverse impacts

on rural populations. Some responses suggested that future reviews should contain more consideration of rural proofing and the difficulty of access to transport within rural communities. Concern was also raised about the suggestion that online delivery in the absence of in person delivery for rural communities could be used as an alternative to in-person delivery. It was felt that this may not be entirely suitable for programmes focused on dialogue and building good relations relationships.

Note also that the potential for future development of the Urban Villages Programme is currently being explored by TEO, including the potential for a form of the programme suitable for rural areas. This was acknowledged by participants but with some concern about the delivery timescales and a possible gap between the current programme and any successor initiative.

Some submissions to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment consultation explicitly addressed specific questions asked by TEO in the RNIA consultation template. As such, Annex 1 is provided to show extracts of responses that correspond to questions asked within the RNIA template. The Rural Needs Network provided a detailed response to all questions asked.

Children’s Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)

The CRIA is a **non-statutory** tool for assessing policy and other proposals. Given the need to move at pace, TEO incorporated an analysis of data on the impact on children and young people into the EQIA (as an aspect of the ‘Age’ Section 75 group), rather than delay decisions on funding groups. All TEO programmes are built upon the fundamental UNCRC rights, which are embedded in TEO’s programmes as a minimum. Three responses were received to the CRIA.

Concern was expressed by consultation participants as to the influence of budget cuts within TEO and the associated effects on service delivery to children and young people.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) provided a detailed response and noted that: “It is difficult to comment meaningfully on the EQIA and CRIA on the TEO budget when only limited information is provided on what the cuts will mean in practice to the allocation against the programmes that will affect children and young people.” This situation arose as a result of the lack of granularity available to TEO on which specific areas the reductions would be implemented at that time. The proposed reductions were high level planning reductions; however individual business areas have been asked to consider the impacts of reductions in their service delivery will have on rural communities, children and other s75 groups.

NICCY recommended that the impact of any budget reductions should have been analysed by TEO by their impact on Children and Young People in the following funding areas, which NICCY identified from the Children and Young People Strategy Delivery Plan:

- i) District Council Good Relations Programme;
- ii) The Urban Villages Initiative;
- iii) Central Good Relations Programme;
- iv) The Communities in Transition Programme;

- v) Minority Ethnic Development Fund;
- vi) Racial Equality Actions; and,
- vii) NI Strategic Migration Partnership.

“Both impact assessments should have included an indication of how the budgets for each of the areas above would be affected, along with outcomes data for each, to allow respondents to reflect on how this would affect children and to comment on which programmes should be protected.”

Similarly, a district council highlighted that there was no evidence presented by TEO to suggest that children and young people’s views were included in the decision-making process behind the draft TEO budget for 2023/24. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children should be involved in decisions that affect them and those views should be taken seriously and acted upon.

A third participant was likewise dissatisfied with the collection of data by TEO stating: “Across Executive Departments, there is a significant gap in the collection of equality data, both by Departments and by NISRA. As data generally is only disaggregated by gender and age, this leaves an incomplete picture of the adverse impacts that policies have on Section 75 equality groups – including children and young people – meaning that EQIAs are limited in their scope.”

Interrelated to this – during the main EQIA consultation process – a common theme expressed was need for greater co-ordination across government departments to improve service delivery in the face of monetary constraints. One participant commented that “it would be helpful to outline how this joined-up working [across government] will be affected by the reductions in budget. For example, during the planning process, did departments liaise with each other in relation to programmes delivered in partnership, to discuss resourcing and how the programmes might be affected?”

Overall, submissions noted the difficult position that TEO occupied in balancing budget cuts with service delivery, but responses were generally unsympathetic to the data presented by TEO on how this would affect children and young people which was described as “very limited.”

Participants would have also appreciated an insight into how the proposed TEO budget cuts would have impacted other programmes such as the NI Strategic Migration Partnership and the Communities in Transition Project. The largest submission to the consultation recommended that TEO ringfence all allocation to children and young people’s programmes in order to prevent further disadvantage to such groups.

No submissions responded to the specific questions answered by TEO in the published Child Rights Impact Assessment template, but instead provided a general narrative.

As such, a similar annex to that provided in Annex 1 for RNIA submission responses has not been included to categorise submissions.

Children’s Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) Comments: Actions to Planned by TEO to Address Consultation Comments in the Future

Officials are currently reviewing the T:BUC Strategy which has included significant engagement with young people. A process is currently being developed that would give young people a voice in the policy design of a new approach to Good Relations.

Within existing governance structures across TEO Strategies, there are a range of arrangements in place with respect to Programme delivery through the T:BUC Strategy which will enable TEO to consider and react to the issues raised in the consultation and use the responses to inform our way forward.

Officials are currently discussing the existing availability and format of s75 data with a view to developing a more comprehensive and cohesive dataset going forward.

General Comments: Actions Planned by TEO on EQIA, CRIA, RNIA Consultation Comments: Now and in the Future

TEO takes its responsibilities in relation to Children’s Rights and Rural Needs seriously. Some of the actions that will help to address the points made by consultees with respect to these two categories, as well as to Section 75 groups more generally, include:

- TEO co-ordinates the NICS Equality Practitioners Group. This group brings together the equality officers in each department who are responsible for providing equality advice to their respective Departments. The Group works to identify and share best practice and meets regularly with the Equality Commission. NICCY recently made a very helpful presentation to this group about the new training available in Child’s Rights Impact Assessments. Other recent topics of discussion at the group have included budget screening and carrying out Equality Impact Assessments;
- TEO has developed an inter-disciplinary team to support policy officials when developing policy or considering new or altered service provision. This team includes an equality professional, statisticians, economists and a data management expert. The main aim of the team is to encourage and support policy officials to consider equality at the earliest point in policy development and to support them in identification for the necessary data;
- In July 2023, TEO worked with ECNI colleagues to support ECNI’s delivery of a training event for Equality and Finance colleagues across NICS on the 2023 Budget and the processes for carrying out equality assessments on budgets;
- TEO has been refreshing the equality training provision to colleagues across the NICS and has developed refreshed online training on our s75 duties for policy makers launching in Autumn ‘23. We have also worked with ECNI to deliver two live webinars on equality screening and equality impact assessments in October ‘23;
- TEO is actively considering how it can improve the collection and accessibility of equality data. The plan going forward includes the harmonisation of equality data, building and improving relationships with the ONS equality data work and then scoping options for the development of a portal which will improve accessibility. TEO is also in the process of forming a Research Committee

which will consider how TEO might gather or commission research that would benefit our work; and,

- NICCY has worked with NICS HR department (Learning and Development) to develop two online training modules (Introduction to **Children's Rights and Conducting CRIAs**) The training modules will be useful additions to the policy-based resources which are available to support officials in developing and updating policy. TEO has actively encouraged the uptake of these courses and the Equality Unit continues to advise and direct colleagues to who wish to conduct these assessments.
- TEO continues to consider what further actions it can take to further embed equality considerations into policy making, and the support that can be provided to assist policy professionals, and others, not just in the performance of their statutory equality duties, but in the making sure that equality considerations and the needs of all citizens are at the centre of policy development.

Annex 1: Summary of Recommendations Received in Relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Consultation for the Executive Office's Spending Plans for 2023–2024.

Question 2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

RNIA submissions agreed that the policy change would likely have an impact on people living in rural areas.

Question 2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

RNIA submissions suggested that this response could have been improved with further detail and consideration of the challenges and difficulties faced by communities in rural areas. The policy change was seen as a detrimental factor on rural communities.

Question 2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

RNIA submissions noted the issues of access and transport as barriers for rural communities and reduced access to services in such regions. It was commented that this section of the RNIA could have been improved by including a more detailed analysis of feedback from responses to the public consultation on the EQIA for TEO's spending plans.

Question 2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

RNIA submissions suggested that any deterioration in good relations because of budget restrictions could potentially impact this rural policy area.

Question 2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

RNIA submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in their response of his RNIA question.

Question 3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in the RNIA answer of TEO to the question.

Question 3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in the RNIA answer of TEO to the question.

Question 3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Submissions agreed with the importance of ensuring that rural areas are not overlooked and that mitigations should be in place to ensure equitable access to good relations services. It was also noted that the Department did not provide datasets broken down by urban/rural categories.

Question 3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

Submissions suggested that TEO should have provided more detail on the nature of segregation in rural communities, the potential impacts this has on minority communities and the implications for delivering community and good relations work in rural areas. Census data on community background, national identity and passports may also have afforded valuable insight.

Question 3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

Submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in the RNIA answer of TEO to the question.

Question 4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Submissions disagreed with any assumption that there is a greater need for funding in urban areas than in rural areas, specifically with regard to good relations funding. They stressed that the segregated nature of many rural communities remains and that race issues were equally prevalent despite the small numbers in the BAME communities in these areas. Returns identified particular barriers to delivery in rural areas, including transport and broadband and mobile phone connectivity.

Question 5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in the RNIA answer of TEO to the question.

Question 5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Submissions welcomed the commitment of TEO that rural communities would be encouraged to apply for funding to both TEO and councils. However, it was also questioned as to who would be acting to encourage rural groups to do this. It was also suggested that TEO monitor applications to ensure that its delivery agents receive proportionate applications from rural communities. Finally, where a successor initiative to the Urban Villages programme was referenced, the delivery timeframe for such a project was questioned and concern was raised as to a possible gap in delivery for rural communities.

Question 5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Submissions did not respond explicitly to the information presented in the RNIA answer of TEO to the question.