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Executive Office

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Dear Paula,

Re: Embedding gender equality in future policy and COVID-19 response

Thank you for your correspondence dated 12 August 2020 to David Sterling which included the Women's Policy Group NI's Covid-19 Feminist Recovery Plan (July 2020).

As you are probably aware, David retired a short time ago and I am replying on behalf of The Executive Office since a new Head of the NI Civil Service has not yet been appointed.

Colleagues across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Departments have considered the detail of the report and its recommendations and I am pleased to enclose a coordinated response.

You will appreciate given the current pressures that while we have sought to be as comprehensive as possible, we expect further information will become available which I have asked my officials to share with you.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Mark Browne

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SCORR-0151-2020: Women's Policy Group NI Covid 19 Feminist Recovery Plan – Composite NICS response

1. Economic Justice Pillar:

1.1 Overview of the Economic Impact of COVID-19

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.1.1 New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) states that the Programme for Government could be underpinned by a suite of social policy inclusion Strategies including an Anti-Poverty Strategy. A commitment has been given that the Strategy will be developed using a co-design and co-production approach and will be based on objective need.
- 1.1.2 The Strategy will tackle inequalities and obstacles that directly affect the everyday lives of the most vulnerable people in society (for example those with caring responsibilities). It will bring focus to identifying and addressing the issues, barriers and disadvantages that undermine equality of opportunity.
- 1.1.3 This pandemic has had a devastating impact on people's jobs, with widespread job losses and reductions in both hours worked and earnings for many people. COVID-19 has created a challenging labour market, with self-employed people struggling and a significant number of the workforce furloughed and at risk of redundancy. It will be important in developing the Anti-Poverty Strategy that all of these issues are considered.
- 1.1.4 There is no doubt that the young people in our society have faced many challenges due to COVID-19, with their career prospects at risk of long term scarring as a result of the depressed labour market. We will of course ensure that the views of children and young people and their needs will be taken into consideration in the development of the Strategy.
- 1.1.5 The Minister is aware of the need for food support across our communities and the likelihood of this continuing as the economic consequences of the pandemic continue. The impacts of COVID-19 and the need to address food insecurity will be considered within the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, ensuring that it is well informed by involving our citizens and communities.

DfE RESPONSE:

BACKGROUND:

- 1.1.6 The Department for the Economy (DfE) notes that COVID-19 has had a host of impacts across society and the economy. While a full assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Northern Ireland will not be possible until the health and economic crises have passed, there is emerging evidence that some

sections of society have been impacted more than others, including the young, those with lower levels of education, qualifications and lower earners.

- 1.1.7 The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) has highlighted the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the young. In particular, the coming months will see a wave of education qualifiers seeking to enter the labour market. However, with reduced demand for entry level positions many students from HE and FE will face difficulties transitioning from their part-time job to their chosen careers. This underemployment of graduate skills will depress intra-labour market flows and reduce vacancies available for lower qualified young people.
- 1.1.8 Although all groups in society face challenges in the short to medium term future, UUEPC found that the most significant labour market barriers are faced by those with lower-level qualifications. Demand will not be returning in the immediate future to many sectors and occupations categorised into a typology of high employment, low productivity, low wage and low growth (prior to the pandemic).
- 1.1.9 This message is echoed by research released by the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP), which found that those aged 18-24 who were still employed in June were almost 18 percentage points more likely than those aged 35-54 to have had their hours cut by at least half or to have been furloughed. Individuals with only GCSE qualifications or equivalent were 17.1 percentage points more likely to have been furloughed or lost at least half of working hours compared with those with a degree.
- 1.1.10 Analysis from the Resolution Foundation has also highlighted the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus crisis on the youngest and oldest earners. Their survey work showed that 18-24-year-olds (excluding full-time students) have been most susceptible to pay swings: over a third have had their pay reduced since before the outbreak, and 13 per cent report pay increases. This can be compared to prime-age adults (35-49-year-olds), 23 per cent of whom have had their earnings reduced, and 5-6 per cent of whom have experienced pay increases. The likelihood of pay falls rises again for those in their late 50s and early 60s, meaning that overall, the chance of pay having fallen follows a U-shaped pattern across the age range.
- 1.1.11 McKinsey & Company research has shown the most vulnerable workers in society are most at risk from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a strong correlation between the likelihood of a worker being furloughed or laid off and them having previously been on a low income. In addition, the proportion of jobs at risk in elementary occupations—which include jobs such as cleaners, kitchen assistants, waiters, and bar staff—is around 44 percent. In contrast, the same number for professional occupations—such as computer programmers, project managers, and accountants—is around 5 percent.
- 1.1.12 This research also found that jobs at risk are also correlated with levels of education. Only around 24 percent of employees in the hospitality, retail, and construction sectors have a higher-education qualification; more than 50

percent of workers in each of these sectors do not have qualifications beyond General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs). At the other end of the spectrum, between 55 and 70 percent of people working in information and communication, financial services, or professional services have a degree or higher-education qualification.

- 1.1.13 DfE would also highlight the following with respect to the sections of the report relating to: Overview of the Economic Impact of COVID-19; Women's Employment and Gender Pay Gap Reporting; and Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work.

Overview of the Economic Impact of COVID-19:

- 1.1.14 The economic impact of COVID-19 is unprecedented. Huge economic impacts that might normally take months or years to unfold occurred within weeks as a result of lockdown and industry shutdowns. DfE has estimated that during the lockdown, output in our economy was operating around 25% below normal. Almost all sectors were affected by the social distancing measures and many businesses have availed of business support schemes and grants from the UK Government and NI Executive.
- 1.1.15 The shutdown of many industries resulted in the widespread furloughing of almost 250,000 workers - almost a third of those eligible here. In addition, around 78,000 availed of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme - almost four-fifths of those eligible making a claim.
- 1.1.16 The Claimant Count has stood at over 60,000 for the last three months in Northern Ireland, around double the number of claimants since March and a return to levels last seen in 2012 and 2013. Almost one quarter of total claimants for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) were aged 16-24 and this age group has experienced the largest increase in claims made since March (+145%). Men (+117%) have experienced a larger increase in JSA claims than women (+110%) across the same period.
- 1.1.17 Analysis completed by DfE has suggested that the number of individuals claiming unemployment benefits could exceed 100,000 before the end of 2020 – levels not seen since the 1980's that will be extremely damaging to our economy. Although the local economy is in recovery, with many sectors re-opening, economic commentators are warning that it may take years before we see economic activity overall back to its pre-pandemic levels.

1.2 Women's Employment and Gender Pay Gap Reporting

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.2.1 The Minister has given a commitment to tackling the Gender Pay Gap and implementing section 19 of the Employment Act 2016. Statutory responsibility for section 19 currently rests with The Executive Office. However, the Minister has recently written to the First and deputy First Minister agreeing to the

formal transfer of statutory responsibility for section 19 to the Department for Communities.

- 1.2.2 In the meantime, DfC officials continue to engage with colleagues across Departments to explore how aspects of section 19 can be implemented prior to full commencement of the legislation. As such, the Minister has agreed that the requirement in s19 for the development of a Strategy and Action Plan to eliminate the Gender Pay Gap will be met through the development of the wider Gender Strategy.

DfE RESPONSE:

- 1.2.3 Over the past decade years both female and male employment rates in NI have increased to all-time highs. However during this period female employment rate has been considerably lower than the male employment rate. According to NISRA in 2019, 68% of women aged 16-64 were in employment - an increase of 7.8pps over the last 10 years with a 1.5pps rise over the past year. This is considerably lower than the male employment rate of 76%, which has increased by 5.7pps over the past 10 years and 2.3pps over the last year. Female employees in NI currently account for 52% of all employees however they account for only 26% of self-employment. In 2019, 30% of working aged females were economically inactive in comparison to 22% of males. Women have had a consistently higher rate of economic inactivity than men for the last 10 years. The main reason for economic inactivity amongst women is linked to family / home commitments (34% of economically inactive women).
- 1.2.4 According to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, in 2019 females who work full time in NI were on average earning 37p more per hour when compared to the male average (£13.13 per hour on average for full time females versus £12.76 per hour for full time males). This is equivalent to a 2.9% gender pay gap in favour of females; larger than the 1.9% gender pay gap in favour of females (equivalent to 24p per hour) recorded in 2018. This is the tenth year in NI where the gender pay gap has been zero or has been in favour of females. NI is the only region of the UK where this is the case. Currently in the UK full-time females (£13.97) earned less than full-time males (£15.34) on average; a gender pay gap of 8.9% in favour of males.

TEO RESPONSE:

- 1.2.5 As mentioned in para 1.2.1 statutory responsibility for Section 19 of the Employment Act 2016 currently rests with the Executive Office. TEO is currently in the process of bringing forward a Transfer of Functions Order to the Executive and NI Assembly to that statutory responsibility in this area can be transferred to DfC.

1.3 Gender Segregated Labour Markets and Care Work

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.3.1 It is important to highlight that the primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide regular and substantial care for a severely disabled person. It is not, and was never intended to be, a carer's wage or a payment for the services of caring. It is also not intended to replace lost or forgone earnings in their entirety. A range of support is available to carers in the social security system. For example, carers on low incomes can access additional financial support through income-related benefits and their associated carer premiums/additions. Carers claiming Universal Credit will be able to benefit from the increase in the standard allowance recently brought forward in response to COVID-19. In addition, carers may, depending on their circumstances, be eligible to access the range of other emergency financial support that the Department for Communities is providing during the pandemic, including Discretionary Support.
- 1.3.2 Carer's Allowance interacts with various other social security benefits in a complex manner. For example, Carer's Allowance is taken fully into account as income in means-tested benefits and is taxable. This would make any temporary rate change or additional one-off coronavirus payment potentially difficult to administer and could mean that carers on a low income and in receipt of a means-tested benefit would not gain fully from any increase or additional payment. Whereas by increasing the rate of an income-related benefit, such as Universal Credit, means that all recipients, including carers, are able to benefit fully from the increase, and consequential access to any passported benefits or advantages would not be negatively impacted.
- 1.3.3 In terms of considering longer term additional support for Carer's Allowance recipients in NI, it is anticipated that the review of welfare mitigation measures will consider supplementary payments for this group.

DfE RESPONSE:

- 1.3.4 Approximately 57% of female employees in NI work in the Health, Retail and Education sectors. These sectors tend to be classified as essential services. At present in NI, women make up 83% of the health workforce and 76% of the education workforce. Further to this, these sectors are dominated by low pay roles with the median gross annual pay for females employed in these key sectors ranging between £12,156 and £19,900, significantly below the NI median gross annual pay of £22,491.

DoH RESPONSE:

- 1.3.5 It is acknowledged that the wider health and social care sector in Northern Ireland is a mostly female workforce. Within the directly employed Health & Social Care workforce this is true of the lower paid jobs as well as many of the higher paid jobs such as senior executives. Within some higher paid professions that are a majority male, such as the consultant workforce at 61%, statistics on doctors in training would indicate that this will change to be a majority female workforce in future.
- 1.3.6 The Health & Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026 takes note of the gender split across the occupational families and impacts that this has. One of its aims is to co-produce a regional work-life balance policy for health and social care workers, another is to produce a regional health and wellbeing policy. Theme 3 of the strategy is about effective workforce planning. Any workforce planning review will account for the gender split and working patterns of a workforce and several reviews to date have actually indicated a need to attract more males into the sector.
- 1.3.7 Any gender pay gap issues that might arise are likely to be mainly attributable to a higher proportion of the HSC female workforce choosing to work part-time at 44% compared to 16% of the HSC male workforce.

1.4 Women's Poverty and Austerity

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.4.1 It is important to highlight that the primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide regular and substantial care for a severely disabled person. It is not, and was never intended to be, a carer's wage or a payment for the services of caring. It is also not intended to replace lost or forgone earnings in their entirety. A range of support is available to carers in the social security system. For example, carers on low incomes can access additional financial support through income-related benefits and their associated carer premiums/additions. Carers claiming Universal Credit will be able to benefit from the increase in the standard allowance recently brought forward in response to COVID-19. In addition, carers may, depending on their circumstances, be eligible to access the range of other emergency financial support that the Department for Communities is providing during the pandemic, including Discretionary Support.
- 1.4.2 Carer's Allowance interacts with various other social security benefits in a complex manner. For example, Carer's Allowance is taken fully into account as income in means-tested benefits and is taxable. This would make any temporary rate change or additional one-off coronavirus payment potentially difficult to administer and could mean that carers on a low income and in receipt of a means-tested benefit would not gain fully from any increase or additional payment. Whereas by increasing the rate of an income-related benefit, such as Universal Credit, means that all recipients, including carers,

are able to benefit fully from the increase, and consequential access to any passported benefits or advantages would not be negatively impacted.

- 1.4.3 In terms of considering longer term additional support for Carer's Allowance recipients in NI, it is anticipated that the review of welfare mitigation measures will consider supplementary payments for this group.
- 1.4.4 The impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt by all sections of society, not least the most vulnerable. As work progresses on the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the use of evidence should ensure that it include actions targeted at mitigating the medium to long term effects of the pandemic, with a particular focus on tackling poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need.

Poverty Statistics in relation to Gender:

1.4.5 Within Northern Ireland and across the UK, females tend to be at a slightly higher risk of being in poverty than males (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Individuals in Relative Poverty by Gender 2018/19 FRS

| | NI | | UK | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | BHC | AHC | BHC | AHC |
| Adult male | 16 | 17 | 15 | 19 |
| Adult female | 18 | 18 | 17 | 20 |
| All individuals | 19 | 20 | 17 | 22 |

1.4.6 Table 2 shows that poverty levels within Northern Ireland are higher for female adults of working age than for male adults of working age both before and After Housing Costs are taken into account. Using the AHC measure, poverty levels are higher in the UK as a whole than in Northern Ireland for both males and females.

Table 2: Proportion of working-age adults in Relative Poverty by gender

| Gender | | | Relative Poverty | | FRS 2018/19 |
|------------------------------|----|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | BHC | AHC | All working-age (0000's) |
| | | | % | % | |
| Males | NI | 17 | 18 | 549.2 | |
| | UK | 15 | 21 | 19,800 | |
| Females | NI | 19 | 20 | 565.5 | |
| | UK | 15 | 22 | 20,000 | |
| All working-age (NI) | | 18 | 19 | 1,114.8 | |
| All working-ages (UK) | | 15 | 21 | 39,800.0 | |

1.4.7 Table 3 shows there are similar poverty rates both before and After Housing costs for male and female pensioners in Northern Ireland. There are higher poverty rates for female pensioners when compared to male pensioners in the UK as a whole. Overall the poverty rate for pensioners in NI (AHC) is lower to that for the UK as a whole (10% compared to 16%).

Table 3: Proportion of pensioners in Relative Poverty by gender

| Gender | Relative Poverty | | FRS 2018/19 | |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------------|
| | BHC | AHC | All pensioner (0000's) | |
| | % | % | | |
| Males | NI | 15 | 11 | 135.9 |
| | UK | 15 | 14 | 5,400.0 |
| Females | NI | 15 | 10 | 157.4 |
| | UK | 20 | 17 | 6,400.0 |
| All pensioners (NI) | | 15 | 10 | 293.3 |
| All pensioners (UK) | | 18 | 16 | 11,800.0 |

1.4.8 Table 4 below shows relative poverty levels in NI by various family types. Single parents with children are the family group most likely to be in poverty both BHC (30%) and AHC (37%). This means that single parent families are approximately 1.5-2 times as likely as the NI average to be living in poverty.

Table 4: Percentage of individuals in low-income groups by various family types

| Percentage of individuals | Source: FRS 2018-19 | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| | BHC | AHC | All individuals (thousands) |
| Family type | | | |
| Pensioner couple | 15 | 10 | 215.5 |
| Single pensioner | 17 | 13 | 103.8 |
| <i>Of which</i> | | | |
| Male | 16 | 14 | 33 |
| Female | 17 | 12 | 70.8 |
| Couple with children | 20 | 22 | 687.2 |
| Couple without children | 15 | 14 | 311.7 |
| Single with children | 30 | 37 | 175.5 |
| Single without children | 18 | 20 | 361.8 |
| <i>Of which</i> | | | |
| Male | 15 | 19 | 206.4 |
| Female | 21 | 22 | 155.4 |
| All individuals (NI) | 19 | 20 | 1,855.6 |
| All individuals (UK) | 17 | 22 | 65,600 |

1.5 Increasing Debt

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.5.1 Anyone experiencing financial difficulty in repaying a loan or debt can contact the Department, and their repayment plan will be reviewed. Guidance and information for anyone experiencing difficulty in repaying their debt is provided through NI Direct and the DfC website.
- 1.5.2 Since October 2017 the Department has been funding five pilot Social Supermarket projects. A Social Supermarket operates on a membership basis, providing members with access to food whilst accessing a wraparound of services.
- 1.5.3 It is hoped that rather than an emergency, static and short term response, the Social Supermarket model can provide people a holistic approach, supplementing food with access to wraparound services to address advice needs across a range of areas including debt, training, skills and volunteering opportunities, which may address the longer term causes of poverty.
- 1.5.4 Evaluation has shown a high demand for the service with the entry profiling of members indicating that the support is reaching those who could be considered to be particularly vulnerable/in need of support with low income and debt obligations. Across all five pilots a significant majority of members have been women.
- 1.5.5 A business case is currently being carried out to consider a full roll out of the model across Northern Ireland.

1.6 Childcare

DE RESPONSE:

Development of the Executive Childcare Strategy:

- 1.6.1 The aims of the Childcare Strategy are to improve child development and promote parental employment. The range of actions necessary to deliver these objectives will require Executive approval and a commitment to significant new and sustained funding.
- 1.6.2 The revised Strategy that is being taken forward by the Department of Education, takes account of the responses to the draft Childcare Strategy consultation undertaken in 2015, the developments in childcare across other jurisdictions and the policy priorities for supporting families which were reaffirmed in the 'New Decade, New Approach'. It focuses on delivering extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care provision for families with children aged from 3-4. However, the Strategy also includes wider aspirations for childcare services for children aged 0-14.
- 1.6.3 There are key policy and resourcing decisions needed including the consideration of the scope of any extended offer and the benefits and costs of

different combinations of funded pre-school education and childcare hours. There will also be decisions required around eligibility (i.e., the extent to which any provision should be universally available or targeted in some way).

- 1.6.4 The level of funding made available will determine, to a large extent what can be achieved. The design, planning and phased implementation of all the options will take a number of years and may require primary legislation.
- 1.6.5 Since March of this year, the Childcare Team has been solely focussed on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and in particular the development of the emergency Childcare Sector Support Scheme to help sustain the sector through the current crisis and support recovery. There has been useful learning which will help shape the Executive's plans for the longer term. The wide ranging and deep engagement with the Childcare Sector Reference Group and colleagues in other jurisdictions over recent months has also been very beneficial in helping inform plans for the longer-term.

Support for parents:

- 1.6.6 Affordability of childcare has been recognised as a key issue for families during the development of the Executive Childcare Strategy. The first phase of the Strategy led to the establishment of the pilot Bright Start School Age Childcare (SAC) Grant Scheme, which financially supports low cost childcare places and has, over the lifetime of the scheme supported some 2,500 low cost childcare places across Northern Ireland in areas of disadvantage, on the schools estate and in rural areas.
- 1.6.7 DE, in conjunction with DoH and Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) colleagues, continues to promote and encourage uptake of the UK-wide financial assistance available, such as Universal Credit or Tax-Free Childcare, to help parents meet the costs of childcare. Parents can use the childcare calculator to determine which support is available to them, and apply for the funding by visiting <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>.
- 1.6.8 DE and DoH have jointly overseen improvements to the Family Support NI website (<http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk>). The Family Support NI website holds the public register of all childcare in Northern Ireland and information on a comprehensive range of family support services. The site provides distinct search facilities for both family support services and child care provision across the whole of NI. The website also links to the Childcare Choices website.

Childcare Support and Recovery (April – August 2020):

- 1.6.9 The Department of Education has worked closely with the Department of Health to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, and, accordingly, launched the £12m Covid-19 Childcare Support Scheme, to address concerns surrounding the viability of childcare providers. The Scheme allowed the provision of childcare for the children of key workers (in accordance with the Department of Health key worker definition) and vulnerable children. This Scheme supported childcare providers from April to the end of June: settings who

remained open; childminders who continued to operate; those providing childcare in workers' homes through an Approved Home Childcare Scheme; and a sustainability measure for those settings forced to close.

1.6.10 The Executive has recognised the need for childcare provision to support economic recovery. Some of the actions taken to help achieve this include:

- On 18 June 2020, the Minister for Education announced the Childcare Recovery Plan;
- From 29 June, the definition of keyworker has no longer applied for access to childcare;
- On 30 June, the Executive announced £10.5m to support childcare recovery. The focus of the Fund is to support more childcare providers who are open and more to re-open during July and August. The Childcare Recovery Fund was launched on 27 July and covers the period 1 July to 31 August; and
- On 1 August, the Department of Health announced further relaxation of restrictions in terms of numbers for childcare providers in line with public health advice.

1.6.11 The Childcare Recovery Plan can be accessed at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/COVID-19%20Childcare%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf>.

1.6.12 More information on the Childcare Recovery Support Fund can be accessed at: <https://www.early-years.org/childcare-recovery-support-fund>.

1.7 Rural Women

DAERA RESPONSE:

1.1.1 DAERA funds the rural element of Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas strand of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme which is a joint DFC/DAERA programme which aims to maximise the ability of women living in disadvantaged/rural areas to contribute to their communities.

1.1.2 Access Poverty is a priority area for intervention under DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework and DAERA funds a range of measures aimed at reducing Access Poverty in rural areas including through improved urban rural linkages and better access to services. Women are listed as a target group under the TRPSI Framework.

1.1.3 The draft Rural Policy Framework for NI aims to create a sustainable rural community where people can work and live. Statistics from the 2011 census show the make-up of the rural community to be 50% men and 50% women. According to the GEM UK: Northern Ireland Report 2017 the Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) in NI in 2017 was 6.5% compared to the

UK average of 8.7%. Females in NI were half as likely to be entrepreneurs as males. An analysis in January 2020 of the Rural Business Investment Scheme 2014-2020 funded by DAERA and delivered under Priority 6 of the Rural Development Programme in Northern Ireland found that in line with wider research there was a disparity between male and female entrepreneurs. In relation to gender males benefitted most from the scheme with 76% of beneficiaries identified as male and 24% female.

Comments on Recommendations:

- **Proposed budgets, PfG and policy recovery plans take account of rural needs (pg. 55).**

1.1.4 The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 imposes a statutory duty on all Northern Ireland Departments, Local Councils and the Public Authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act to have due regard to rural needs in relation to the development, adoption, implementation and revision of policies, strategies and plans and in the design and delivery of public services.

- **Historic underinvestment in rural women is recognised and efforts made to redress when future resourcing is being planned (pg. 55).**

1.1.5 DAERA continues to fund the rural element of the Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas strand of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme which is a joint DfC/DAERA programme which aims to maximise the ability of women living in disadvantaged/rural areas to contribute to their communities.

- **Recognition that all Government Departments have a responsibility to deliver for rural women, not only DAERA (pg.55).**

1.1.6 All Government Departments have responsibilities in respect of both urban and rural areas in relation to their functions. Under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 all departments have a duty to have due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas when designing and delivering public services.

DfC RESPONSE:

1.1.7 The Department funds the Women's Regional Consortium under its Regional Infrastructure Support Programme in recognition of the specific needs of women and women's organisations. The four high level policy outcomes are:

- Organisations serving the needs of women living in disadvantaged areas and rural areas, have access to the specialist support they require to function effectively and efficiently;
- The VCS, including women's organisations, is supported in making a valued and effective contribution to policy development across

Government specific to women living and working in disadvantaged areas and rural areas;

- There is increased participation and improved community development/engagement amongst women from all disadvantaged communities and in rural areas; and
- There are improved working relationships, better collaboration and more effective partnerships, pertaining to the specific interests and needs of women from disadvantaged areas and rural women's needs, across the VCS and Government.

1.1.8 The COVID Community Support Fund (COVID CSF) provided financial support, via Councils, to grassroots organisations in both rural and urban areas responding to the coronavirus pandemic. The first tranche of £1.5m was allocated in April 2020 and on 5 August 2020 an additional £1.75 million was allocated to Councils. This funding will continue to support the vital role of the grassroots voluntary and community sector groups, and provide financial support to sustain their viability.

1.1.9 Work has already begun in developing a future volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland. This strategy will provide a positive reinforcing context for volunteering activity in NI across all of central/ local government and VCS interests. It will be building on the immense momentum achieved in terms of both formal and informal volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic in both rural and urban areas within NI. It has been recognised that roles in Volunteering are changing and this will also be looked at in detail, as well as the needs of the roles and how collectively these roles can be supported. The older cohort of volunteers will also be considered and due to shielding or restrictions older volunteers may have wanted to volunteer but were unable to during the crisis. So it is important to consider the different roles they can do as we move into the recovery phase.

1.1.10 During the development of the strategy, focus will be placed on what worked well, what could/ should have been done differently and what are the parallel experiences / practices in other areas jurisdictions. While responding to the crisis there had been little time to reflect on decisions and actions taken because of the urgency of the response needed. The 'lessons learnt' from the analysis will be critical in terms of contingency planning and sustainability should there be a second wave of the virus. There is also an immediate short-term need to help the VCS sector to adjust to the challenges and requirements of a 'new normal' for volunteering activity especially as the lockdown restrictions ease in NI and we move into recovery.

1.8 De-commodification of Housing and Further Education

DfC RESPONSE:

- 1.8.1 The four recommendations relating to housing focus on restricting home ownership, expanding the role of the state and paying for housing through taxation instead of rent. They suggest an entire reordering of our economic system. Some of the required actions are outside the remit of DfC or the Executive, and we suggest would begin to engage Protocol 1 Article 1 Rights (right to free enjoyment of property).
- 1.8.2 That said, DfC are progressing a number of policies and initiatives to increase housing supply generally, improve housing security, conditions and affordability generally and particularly for the most vulnerable members of our society. This is in recognition that adequate Housing is crucial to our health, well-being and to that of our families and our communities.
- 1.8.3 The Department's goal in progressing this body of work is that every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs. DfC considers four main themes or work streams as critical to achieving this goal, as follows:
- 1) Increasing Housing Supply and options across all tenures for those whose current housing circumstances do not meet their needs – DfC is working hard to look at increasing output from our new build social housing programme to deliver more social houses in the longer term – and to build them where they are needed most. It is also looking at ways to increase the range of intermediate home options to help increase mixed tenure. There is a common set of issues affecting all of these (e.g. planning, construction skills, infrastructure, carbon reduction and ageing population) as well as the ongoing impact of the coronavirus crisis and work has already commenced to develop a long term Housing Supply Strategy to underpin delivery of this ambition.
 - 2) Making the best use of our existing housing – undoubtedly the biggest challenge we face – not just DfC but the whole NI Executive – will be securing the future of the NIHE as a landlord. Next year will mark the Housing Executive's 50th anniversary, and it is vital that we build on what has been achieved by it over the last fifty years, to make it fit for the future. The investment challenge is substantial, and the cost will only increase if we do not soon build a consensus to reinvigorate it and enable investment in its homes. Additional to that challenge, the Minister is considering the proposals for changes to social housing allocations that were consulted on in 2017 and has already given a commitment to bring forward proposals on that as a priority. Supporting people to live in their homes is also critical; with this in mind, DfC is also updating its Fuel Poverty Strategy and ensuring alignment with the Energy Strategy and Climate Change Bill.
 - 3) Improving the Private Rented Sector – the Minister wants to ensure that the private rented sector is the best that it can be for those who look to it as their preferred housing option. The Department will be looking closely

at the recommendations which came out of the Review of the Private Rented Sector, and how to take this work forward. The recommendation to transfer landlord registration functions to local Councils is one example of where detailed work has commenced.

- 4) Improving Housing for the most vulnerable – the Department is committed to Improving our response to homelessness. There is already significant Interdepartmental work going on, in particular building on the response to the coronavirus emergency, including the production of a Chronic Homeless Action Plan. The Minister also wants to improve the Supporting People Programme – ensuring ongoing protection of the budget, along with ensuring the programme is delivered as efficiently as possible by implementing the recommendations of the 2015 review.

1.9 A Feminist Green Economy

DAERA RESPONSE:

Theme 4. Democracy and Ownership:

- **Promoting economic, ecological and carbon education campaigns for schools and the wider public to be adequately funded through a Climate Change Act and within the Programme for Government (pg. 65),**

1.9.1 Eco-Schools funding and the current Tackling Plastics campaign, as well as legacy work on food waste prevention and Rethink Waste through schools, which have supported New Decade New Approach commitments and current Programme for Government Outcome. Funding for these initiatives has been enduring in order to promote awareness with young people and to address topical issues.

1.9.2 DAERA provides financial support to Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) which runs a number of programmes to develop and support educational & promotional campaigns aimed at achieving behavioural change.

1.9.3 Eco-Schools is one of these very successful programmes which focuses on practical, positive environmental behavioural change in school children. Northern Ireland was the first country in the world to have every single school signed up to the international Eco-Schools programme, which makes environmental awareness & action an intrinsic part of the life and ethos of schools.

1.9.4 Additional current funding of over £1 million has been committed through the Environment Fund to further support KNIB's educational & promotional campaigns.

- **Ensure equality impact assessments of all environmental policies and ensure consultation on policies with groups representing various genders, races and classes within civil society (pg. 65),**

1.9.5 Announced by Minister Poots at the Assembly on 23 June 2020, DAERA are leading the development of a Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework for Northern Ireland.

1.9.6 Its aim will be to transform our society to net zero by 2050, protect and enhance our environment and sustainably grow our economy.

1.9.7 It will link together all the relevant areas of policy and delivery to maintain a clear and long term focus.

1.9.8 Co-design will be the foundation on which the strategy is developed and officials will ensure there is opportunity for full and effective input from stakeholders during this process.

1.10 Paramilitarism, Gate Keeping and Control of Funding

DoJ RESPONSE:

- 1.10.1 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.
- 1.10.2 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

2. Health Pillar:

2.1 Mental Health Concerns due to COVID-19

DfC RESPONSE:

- 2.1.1 Although this is primarily a matter for the Department of Health, we expect that it will be considered in the development of the cross-cutting Gender Strategy and Sexual Orientation Strategy under New Decade, New Approach.
- 2.1.2 The new Disability Strategy will focus on pan-disability issues, with a view to developing interventions targeted at improving the lives of all disabled people. The topic of mental health as a cause or consequence of disability will be examined in the context of the new Disability Strategy. Given the Strategy's emphasis on co-design and co-production, opportunities for interventions that contribute to better mental health and wellbeing may be identified by stakeholders during the development of the Strategy.
- 2.1.3 As is recognised in the Feminist Recovery Plan, along with the physical health considerations, one of the most concerning health implications from the COVID-19 lockdown is the impact on women's mental health. DfC believes that Sport can play a significant role in helping females to overcome both these physical and mental health challenges as society moves away and recovers from the Covid pandemic. Indeed, increasing female participation in sport and physical activity is a key target in DfC's Sport Matters Strategy and is an ongoing priority for DfC. As a result DfC and Sport NI have provided both financial and practical support to the sector to grow female participation in sport. For example in recent years DfC and Sport NI have worked closely with the Female Sports Forum to implement its Women in Sport: Active, Fit & Sporty Strategy. This aims to raise the profile of women's sport and increase opportunities for females to get involved in sport - from participation through to administrative and management roles within sports clubs.
- 2.1.4 DfC has also been working with Sport NI, and in partnership with PHA, to assist in bringing a positive mental health culture to National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and their clubs, to assist in raising the awareness of mental health and to implement a programme to help in signposting sports club members to the support services available, particularly for female participants. For example in 2019 DfC worked closely with Sport NI and other partners including Ulster University, as the NI Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan for 2019-2025 was developed and published. The Action Plan demonstrates a commitment to improve the mental health and wellbeing for people, including female participants, involved in Sport in the north. The Department has also overseen the establishment of the NI Wellbeing in Sport Forum which involves representation from Sport NI, PHA, Departments, statutory and voluntary bodies, further education and NGBs including the NI Sports Forum. This forum has responsibility for implementing the action plan and has established working groups around training, coaching, communication, research, insights and developing the role of a Mental Health and Wellbeing

officer in sports clubs. DfC is keen to develop this work further as we start to recover as a society from Covid 19.

- 2.1.5 The Department, as a supporting measure to meeting material needs of citizens during the lockdown period, funded a Community Wellbeing initiative led by Inspire. It brings together 12 mental health charities and all of the Health Living Centres in NI with the aim of amplifying public health messaging and reaching more people, thus improving uptake of service and self-help tools.

DoH RESPONSE:

- 2.1.6 It is worth noting that the mental health evidence thus far does not indicate any significant gender differences. There are a small number of middle aged women who have been admitted to mental health hospital with severe psychosis during Covid which is highly unusual. There are also indications that low level depression rates among women of all ages are increased due to Covid. However, considering suicides there has been no gender disparity in the increase. Among children in England where there has been a significant increase in suicide the only discernible distinction is age, whereas the gender proportion has been constant.
- 2.1.7 It is accepted that the pandemic has had an impact on the mental health of a large proportion of the population.

DoJ RESPONSE:

- 2.1.8 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.
- 2.1.9 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

2.2 Women with Caring Responsibilities and Dependents

DoH RESPONSE:

- 2.2.1 The 2011 Census shows that 214,000 people were providing some form of unpaid care, equating to approximately one-in-eight residents in Northern Ireland (12%). Of this figure 119,400 people aged 16-74 provide unpaid care whilst being in employment. Women are more likely to provide care than men and of the total population who provide 50 hours or more unpaid care per week 60 percent are female. Whilst at times very rewarding, caring can be challenging and stressful for unpaid carers and can have detrimental effects on physical and mental health.

2.2.2 The Minister of Health recently put on record his wholehearted appreciation and thanks for the significant contribution carers have made during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carers have gone over and above what was expected of them in the care and support that they have given to their family members and loved ones given, for example, that respite and short break provision was in most instances unavailable.

2.2.3 The Department of Health published a carer's strategy in 2006, entitled **Caring for Carers**: www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/caring-carers. Officials are carefully considering options on how best to address issues affecting carers particularly in light of the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified key learning points. The Department recognises the huge contribution carers make to the HSC in terms of the care and support given to those who need it and the often very difficult challenges carers face. The Department will continue to work closely with carers and carer representatives to meet the needs of carers, including their mental health and wellbeing.

2.3 Additional Health Concerns

DoH RESPONSE:

2.3.1 The COVID-19 HSC **Clinical Ethics Forum** was established at the request of the CMO to assist in the resolution of ethical dilemmas in clinical decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic escalation, in particular when demand outstrips access to resources. This has led to the development of a framework for the management of ethical dilemmas in clinical practice:

- To provide an overarching set of principles for the HSC in clinical decision-making for everyone seeking or requiring access to health and social care services;
- To promote and maintain ethical standards relating to clinical practice across HSC organisations and sectors, including HSC Trusts, secondary care, primary, social and community care, particularly during the period of pandemic escalation; and
- To develop a regional process for access to ethical advice and support when needed, including standards for such advice within individual Trusts.

2.3.2 The **Covid-19 Guidance: Ethical Advice and Support Framework**, approved by CMO was issued to the service on 5 June 2020. Membership has been drawn by nomination from all Trusts, HSC Board and PHA on a multi-professional basis, representing different specialties, with strong representation from all Trust clinical ethics committees including lay and faith representatives. Many members have experience or qualification in clinical ethics. One of the lay members is physically disabled and another has a child with a severe intellectual disability, and both of these are very active contributors and powerful advocates for disability rights. A range of interested parties (such as the Patient and Client Council) and reference groups (such

as Disability Action) have been engaged directly by the Forum in the development of the Framework.

2.3.3 The Public Health Agency and the Department’s websites include a wealth of information and guidance for **people with physical, sensory disability and people with a communication difficulty**.

2.3.4 For blind and partially sighted people, the Department in conjunction with DfC colleagues, Guide Dogs NI and the Royal National Institute for the Blind published an information sheet. This document highlights key contact numbers and advice on how blind and partially sighted people can get support in their local community.

Update by programme:

| Programme: | Update: |
|--|---|
| <p>BOWEL CANCER</p> <p>Target audience:</p> <p>Men and women, aged 60-74 yrs; screening invitation every 2yrs.</p> | <p>Screening invitations were paused from week beginning 23 March 2020.</p> <p>In line with elsewhere in the UK, the initial focus of restoration was to significantly reduce the backlog in those waiting for screening colonoscopy or pre-assessment prior to recommencing the issue of new screening invitations. Screening colonoscopy services resumed in Trusts from June at a reduced throughput.</p> <p>Given that most Trusts will have substantially cleared their backlog (for colonoscopy) by the end of August, invites for the bowel cancer screening programme recommenced from the week beginning 17 August. A catch up exercise is unlikely to be viable in the short term due to limitations in colonoscopy capacity.</p> |
| <p>BREAST CANCER</p> <p>Target audience:</p> <p>Women, aged 50-70 yrs; screening invitation every 3yrs.</p> | <p>The NI Breast Screening Programme normally invites around 87,000 women a year for routine screening. Routine breast cancer screening was paused from the 16 March onwards.</p> <p>Higher Risk Breast Screening continued during the pandemic: all higher risk screening is undertaken at the Northern Trust unit, but uptake decreased during the pandemic with some women electing to cancel or not to attend.</p> |

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| | <p>These women are now being contacted again with a further screening offer.</p> <p>Two Trusts restarted routine breast screening on 20 July with the other two Trust providers restarting on the 27 July.</p> <p>Considerable logistical issues remain regarding the capacity to screen safely, particularly within mobile screening facilities. Consideration is being given to the redesign of the mobile units, and to the costs and benefits of undertaking modifications which are likely to require significant capital funding.</p> <p>The screening restart process has commenced using a phased and risk-based approach with the mobile units as currently configured. However, the reintroduction of breast screening will see a significant reduction in throughput compared to pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>Phase 1 of the restart is focused on those women who should have been screened during the pause in screening (mid-March – end of July). This phase should be completed by November 2020.</p> <p>Phase 2 - time scales for Phase 2, essentially catching up in order to invite women when they would normally expect to be screened, are still to be determined.</p> |
| <p>CERVICAL CANCER</p> <p>Target audience:</p> <p>Women aged 25-49 yrs invited for screening every three years; those aged 50-64 yrs invited every five years.</p> | <p>Invites for March and April were paused. Women already invited were able to attend their GP for screening, with cervical smear samples being processed and managed as usual.</p> <p>Restoration of services began with the first cohort of women being issued with invitation letters in the week beginning 29 June – this included those who were due a screening test and had been coded as suspended, and those with a previous inadequate result which had recommended a repeat smear test. This</p> |

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| | <p>was approximately 5,000 women. A letter was issued to primary care / GPs on the 19 June to advise of this step.</p> <p>The next group invited (from mid-July) were women where either colposcopy or if laboratories had requested a repeat smear test.</p> <p>Routine 3 or 5 year recall invitations at normal volumes recommended from mid-August. This includes routine reminder letters for those women who may have chosen not to attend for screening in the weeks before the Covid-19 lockdown. A longer term catch-up exercise will be dependent on primary care, lab and colposcopy capacity.</p> |
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2.4 Health Impacts of Austerity on Women

DfC RESPONSE:

- 2.4.1 Universal Credit was rolled out in NI for new claims between 27 September 2017 and 5 December 2018.
- 2.4.2 The overall policy intent of Universal Credit is to address poverty through tackling worklessness and benefit dependency and by doing so contribute to the achievement of economic and societal benefits such as better health, educational attainment and reduced crime rates.
- 2.4.3 Universal Credit is an integrated, income related, working age credit that provides households with a basic allowance topped up by additional components to recognise the needs of families with children, disability and health conditions that limit work, housing costs and caring responsibilities. It creates a simpler system for claimants by replacing the existing income related benefits for working age adults with one benefit.
- 2.4.4 Split Payments: In exceptional circumstances payment of Universal Credit can be divided between two members of the household.
- 2.4.5 Split Payments are to prevent hardship to the claimant and their family and should only be considered in certain specific situations e.g. domestic violence or where financial abuse occurs and one partner mismanages the Universal Credit payment.
- 2.4.6 A Split Payment can be paid to two separate members of the household, with the larger percentage allocated to the person with primary caring responsibilities i.e. the one with child-care. This is to ensure the health and well-being of the majority of the household.

2.4.7 It is anticipated that both men and women will see significant improvements in their incentives to work and there are not any significant gender bias resulting from entitlement to Universal Credit.

Welfare Supplementary Payments:

2.4.8 Welfare Supplementary Payments were introduced in 2016 to supplement the income of people who experienced a financial loss due to the changes in social security benefits. The aim was to help people adjust to the new arrangements.

2.4.9 The welfare mitigation package was the result of cross-party agreement in NI and is fully funded by the Executive from the block grant. The result is a comprehensive package of financial support that means the welfare system in NI has been more generous than in GB.

2.4.10 The mitigation schemes reflect the specific challenges that welfare reform presented for many people in NI. With higher rates of people receiving Disability Living Allowance it was vital to provide support for people who lost benefit following the transition to Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The mitigation package ensures that many people continue to receive the same rates of benefit if they pursue an appeal of the Department's decision on their PIP claim.

2.4.11 The mitigation of the so called "bedroom tax" and the Benefit Cap were also considered essential to protect families in NI. The particular importance of these mitigation schemes is reflected in the fact that they are not time-limited. Overall, in the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 almost £124 million has been paid in welfare mitigation payments.

2.4.12 Welfare Supplementary Payments continue to provide support for people impacted by:

- The Benefit Cap;
- Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC);
- Time Limiting of contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA);
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) reassessment, including
- Loss of Carer Payments; and
- Loss of Disability-Related Premiums.

2.4.13 Discretionary Support was introduced as a NI specific scheme to replace Social Fund Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses following their abolition as part of the package of welfare reforms. It provides a fast and responsive means of receiving short term financial support.

2.4.14 The scheme seeks to assist those on low income (working and non-working) when an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation arises presenting a significant

risk to the health, safety or well-being of either the person making the claim to Discretionary Support or their immediate family.

2.5 Abortion, Maternal Health and Bodily Autonomy

DoH RESPONSE:

Abortion:

Comments:

- 2.5.1 This section of the report is premised on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommendations referenced in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019 (the Act).
- 2.5.2 The 2018 CEDAW Report (Report of the inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) made a number of recommendations regarding sexual and reproductive health, including abortion, in Northern Ireland.
- 2.5.3 The Act, among other things, placed a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure the recommendations set out in the Report are implemented, and decriminalised abortion in Northern Ireland. In part fulfilment of the duty, the Secretary of State made the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 (then the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020), which provide a legal framework for abortion provision in Northern Ireland.
- 2.5.4 It was originally intended that women would continue to use the free abortion services available in England until services were available in Northern Ireland. However, as the Regulations came into force on 31 March 2020, just as Covid-19 travel restrictions were introduced, it has proved impracticable for women to use the English provision.
- 2.5.5 In recognition of the health risks to women procuring abortion from unregulated providers, but mindful that abortion is a controversial matter outside the Programme for Government, the Health Minister sought Executive agreement to explore options to establish an emergency Early Medical Abortion service during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Executive has not yet agreed the proposal. This being the case, there are no commissioned abortion services in Northern Ireland.
- 2.5.6 Despite the absence of commissioned services, abortion is legal and is being provided by some registered medical professionals working in the HSC. Between 1 April 2020 and 26 August 2020, 536 abortions have been notified to the Chief Medical Officer.
- 2.5.7 Work to scope the wider sexual and reproductive recommendations was paused as staff were redeployed to work on the Covid-19 response.

Feedback:

2.5.8 As abortion is a controversial matter outside the agreed Programme for Government, the Minister is required to seek Executive agreement to the commissioning of abortion services.

Response:

2.5.9 Action on the report's recommendations on abortion are subject to Executive agreement.

Maternal Health:

2.5.10 The Department recognises the serious mental and physical health issues associated with the pandemic and this will be taken into account in the new **Maternity Strategy**, which will be developed following a Review of Maternity and Neonatal services.

2.5.11 It is important to stress that the timescales for completing the Review and developing the new Maternity Strategy are uncertain due to the ongoing pandemic.

2.5.12 The Maternity Strategy will be co-produced giving opportunity for input from marginalised and lobby groups. The new Maternity Strategy will also be equality screened and in line with Departmental guidance a full equality impact assessment will be completed if necessary.

2.5.13 The Department accepts that the *COVID-19: Regional Principles For Visiting Maternity Services In Northern Ireland* is far from ideal but necessary in the Covid-19 context. This document will be kept under review as we recognise it is causing stress for women and partners

Bodily autonomy:

2.5.14 This is not a separate policy area in DoH and we would require clarity on exactly what this relates to and what services so we can consider further.

2.6 Health Inequalities and Hostile Environment for Migrants and Racialised People

DoH RESPONSE:

2.6.1 Health outcomes are not just determined by the clinical services we deliver. The evidence demonstrates that **inequalities in health outcomes** arise because of inequalities in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. In order to address health inequalities we therefore need to tackle the wider social determinants of health and reduce inequalities in these determinants. This approach is at the heart of Making Life Better, which is the Executive's overarching strategic framework to improve health and address health inequalities.

- 2.6.2 In June 2020 Public Health England (PHE) published two reports “Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 in BAME groups” and “Disparities in the Risk and Outcomes of COVID-19”.
- 2.6.3 “Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19” found that the highest age standardised diagnosis rates of COVID-19 per 100,000 population were in people of Black ethnic groups (486 in females and 649 in males) and the lowest were in people of White ethnic groups (220 in females and 224 in males). An analysis of survival among confirmed COVID-19 cases showed that, after accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared to people of White British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British.
- 2.6.4 “Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 in BAME groups” undertook a wider review of the literature and was informed by a stakeholder engagement programme which considered long standing inequalities, increased exposure to COVID-19, and the impact of racism, discrimination, stigma, fear and trust. This concluded that “the pandemic exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities affecting BAME groups in the UK”.
- 2.6.5 The Department is considering the recent PHE reports and their implications for BAME groups here, as well as the ongoing work by NISRA and collaboration between Departmental officials and the PHA and HSCB on the issue.
- 2.6.6 Health inequalities in Northern Ireland are assessed and monitored by the Department through the NI Health & Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System (HSCIMS) which provides a comprehensive analysis of a range of health outcomes and inequality gaps including, urban and rural gaps, deprivation, and gaps between males and females. The HSCIMS, established in 2002, currently assesses over 50 health and social care indicators relating to life expectancy and general health, premature mortality, disease prevalence, hospital activity, mental health, alcohol, smoking and drugs, pregnancy and early years, and childhood obesity.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research/health-inequalities-statistics>

- 2.6.7 A Life Expectancy report is also produced annually from the HSCIMS which in addition to presenting the latest official estimates of life expectancy in Northern Ireland, includes an examination of the causes that contribute to the change in life expectancy over time, as well as the differentials between genders and between local areas including the most and least deprived.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/life-expectancy-northern-ireland>

- 2.6.8 Eligibility to **access publicly funded healthcare** in Northern Ireland is based on ordinary residence.

- 2.6.9 A person will be ordinarily resident when that residence is lawful, voluntary and for a settled purpose as part of the regular order of life for the time being. Nationals of countries outside the EEA must also have indefinite leave to remain in the UK in order to be considered ordinarily resident.
- 2.6.10 Anyone who is ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland is eligible to access publicly funded healthcare.
- 2.6.11 Anyone who is not ordinarily resident is a visitor and access to healthcare in Northern Ireland is provided under the Health and Personal Social Services Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (“the 2015 Regulations”).
- 2.6.12 These Regulations make certain health services available to visitors in Northern Ireland at a charge determined by the Department of Health. The Regulations also provide various exemptions from charge, some services are always exempt from charge whilst some categories of visitor are exempt from charge.
- 2.6.13 The services which are always exempt from charge include accident and emergency services and treatment for certain diseases. Since 7th March 2020 treatment for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) has been exempt from charge to ensure that there is no financial barrier to visitors to Northern Ireland receiving treatment for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland were informed of this on 6th March 2020.
- 2.6.14 The categories of visitor which are always exempt from charge include refugees and asylum seekers, including failed asylum seekers, victims, and suspected victims of human trafficking and those individuals who are determined to be exempt from charge on exceptional humanitarian grounds.
- 2.6.15 The Business Services Organisation compiles personal data of those who have accessed healthcare services in Northern Ireland and have outstanding debts, this information is sent to the Home Office in accordance with the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules (HC 1511) dated 10 October 2011 and subsequent updates.
- 2.6.16 UK border policy and the rules on immigration remain the responsibility of the Home Office and not devolved to the NI Assembly.

2.7 Trans Healthcare

DfC RESPONSE:

- 2.7.1 Although this is primarily a matter for the Department of Health, we expect that it will be considered in the development of the cross-cutting Gender Strategy and Sexual Orientation Strategy under *New Decade, New Approach*.

DoH RESPONSE:

- 2.7.2 The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's **Regional Gender Identity Service** is provided at the Brackenburn Clinic, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Belfast. The clinic is not currently in a position to progress patients on the waiting list due to recruitment and retention issues. The Trust has made repeated efforts to recruit the necessary professionals into the service but has been unsuccessful in its efforts. Due to staff leaving the service or nearing retirement, it is no longer able to safely meet the needs of new patients.
- 2.7.3 The Gender Identity Pathway Review Group was established in September 2019 at the request of the Department to identify an appropriate service model to meet the needs of service users in Northern Ireland. The work of the Review Group was paused in mid-March 2020 to allow the HSCB and Belfast Trust colleagues to focus on their response to COVID-19. The Department is working with the HSCB, Belfast Trust and other key stakeholders to restart this work. The expected completion date for this review was the end of June 2020 but this will now need to be extended. Work is already underway to restart the review of gender identity services.
- 2.7.4 Service user representatives are important members of the Review Group and were appointed after an expression of interest process. The group is keen to inject momentum back into the review process. This work will include the establishment of a service user liaison group to further facilitate co-production with the transgender community and their representatives.
- 2.7.5 The Chairperson of the review group is currently consulting with the two service user representatives in order to establish a more structured process for engagement with stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector. This work includes an options appraisal report which will be the platform for engagement with a wider group of stakeholders which the Chairperson hopes to take forward over the next few months.

2.8 Disabled Women

DfC RESPONSE:

Response to recommendation calling for reform of PIP application process:

- 2.8.1 The key objective of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is to focus support on those who have the greatest daily living and mobility needs. The Office for Budget Responsibility *Welfare Trends Report* published in 2019 indicates that "...PIP appears to have increased spending on disability benefits significantly – by perhaps £1 billion to £2 billion a year...". In NI more people are being awarded the highest rates of benefit under PIP than under DLA. Overall 39% of PIP recipients are getting the highest level of benefit (£151.40 a week) compared to 15% of working age DLA recipients prior to the introduction of the new benefit.

Response to increasing Local Housing Allowance rates:

- 2.8.2 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) determines Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates used to calculate housing benefit for tenants renting from private landlords.
- 2.8.3 LHA rates are based on private market rents being paid by tenants in the broad rental market area (BRMA). This is the area within which a person might reasonably be expected to live. LHA rates are based on rents, and limited by legislation. LHA rates are determined on a yearly basis, and is the amount of rent which it would be reasonable to expect Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to cover for a property of a particular type in a particular area.
- 2.8.4 As part of the Government's Strategy of supporting people affected by Covid-19, the Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 provided for the LHA Rates have increased to the 30th percentile from 30th March 2020.
- 2.8.5 People on benefit can also access Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) which can provide extra money when a claimant needs extra help to meet housing costs where there is a shortfall between eligible and contractual rent. The DHP Scheme is administered by NIHE.
- 2.8.6 To address concerns around increasing levels of rent arrears for anyone moving from Housing Benefit onto Universal Credit, there is a two week 'transitional housing payment', commonly referred to as a 'run-on'. This extra two weeks of Housing Benefit is to help with housing costs while the person waits for their first payment of Universal Credit.

Response to extending the increase to the standard allowance:

- 2.8.7 Universal Credit payments combine a standard allowance with any extra amounts that may apply, for example if there are children in the household, someone has a disability, or housing costs are required. As part of the Government's Strategy of supporting people affected by Covid-19, the Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 provided that from 6 April the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit was increased for one year. Both will increase by £20 per week on top of planned annual uprating. This will apply to all new and existing Universal Credit claimants and to existing Working Tax Credit claimants. This means that for a single Universal Credit (UC) claimant (aged 25 or over), the standard allowance will increase from £317.82 to £409.89 per month.
- 2.8.8 As this is a temporary intervention to provide support during the pandemic, this increase is currently in place over the 2020/21 tax period but we will keep this under review if the crisis goes on longer than expected.

Response to ending the Universal Credit 5 Week Wait:

- 2.8.9 No one has to wait 5 weeks when they make a claim to Universal Credit. Every person making a claim for the first time is offered an advance payment on application.
- 2.8.10 To address concerns around the level of monthly deductions from a person's Universal Credit payment, the amount that can be deducted was reduced in October 2019 from 40% to 30% of their standard allowance. Given the concerns associated with the recovery of advance payments, from October 2021 the repayment period for these advances will be extended from 12 to 24 months.
- 2.8.11 The recent increases to UC mean that on average, every UC award will go up by approximately £90 per month. The average repayment of an advance is only £50 per month. So in effect, every UC applicant could now take out a UC advance for their full entitlement and still be on average £40 per month better off after repaying their advance every month. This, in combination with the ability to delay repaying advances for 3 months, should ensure that no one suffers financially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.8.12 A further change will be introduced from July 2020 introducing a two-week 'run-on' for new Universal Credit claims for people who were previously claiming Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. This will bridge the gap between making a claim and receiving the first payment of Universal Credit.

Response to issuing Advance Payments as grants instead of loans:

- 2.8.13 People claiming Universal Credit in NI also have access to the Universal Credit Contingency Fund. The amount of an individual payment is calculated at the rate of 50% of the Universal Credit standard allowance for any adults in the household plus an amount equal to the child element for each child. All payments from the Universal Credit Contingency Fund are non-repayable grants.
- 2.8.14 The Department removed (on 1st January 2020) the requirement that people must take out a Universal Credit advance payment before being eligible for a payment from the Universal Credit Contingency Fund.

Response to extending the suspension of benefit deductions to include Universal Credit Advance Payments:

- 2.8.15 The repayment time for advances has already been extended from 6 months to 12 months, and a further extension to 24 months from October 2021 was announced in the Budget 2020. Claimants can ask for advance repayments to be delayed for up to 3 months in exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, from October 2019 the overall maximum level of deductions that can be taken from Universal Credit was reduced from 40% to 30% of the Standard Allowance, and will be decreased further to 25% by October 2021.

Response to changing the differing treatment of Maternity Allowance and Statutory Maternity Pay within Universal Credit:

- 2.8.16 The overall aim in providing Maternity benefits is to enable mothers to take time from work in the interest of her own and her baby's health and to bond with her baby by providing financial support for living costs during that time. There is a distinction in how Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and Maternity Allowance (MA) are arranged and administered.
- 2.8.17 SMP is paid by employers to qualifying employed women. Basic conditions of entitlement are that the claimant earns at least £118 a week on average, and has worked for her employer continuously for at least 26 weeks continuing into the 'qualifying week' - the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth. As payments of SMP are made by an employer, they are subject to deductions for income tax and national insurance contributions. It stands, therefore, that payments of SMP are earnings for tax purposes.
- 2.8.18 MA is paid by the Department to self-employed women, and employed women who are not eligible for SMP.
- 2.8.19 Universal Credit (UC) is a single welfare payment which replaces a range of legacy benefits. It is made up of a standard allowance and any extra applicable amounts (for example to reflect the care of children). UC is designed to provide help to those who have low or no income and as it is aligned to the tax system, any earnings are taken into account against any potential entitlement. Similarly, any unearned income, is taken into account but is not subject to work allowances or earnings taper.
- 2.8.20 The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has recently agreed to consider the differing treatment of maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay under the UC regulations, where MA is treated as unearned income which is deducted pound for pound, whereas the SMP is treated as earned income and is subject to work allowances (where applicable) and the taper.
- 2.8.21 The development of a new Disability Strategy as referenced in New Decade, New Approach is being commenced. The Strategy will be taken forward through a co-design approach with meaningful input from disabled people, including disabled women, and their representative organisations throughout all stages of the process. The new Strategy will take account of the NI administration's commitments in respect of international obligations including UNCRPD.
- 2.8.22 The Disability Strategy will form part of a suite of social inclusion Strategies and will be developed alongside a new Anti-Poverty Strategy; Gender Strategy; and Sexual Orientation Strategy. There will be alignment across all four new Strategies and issues including intersectionality and interventions to mitigate the medium to long term effects of Covid-19 will be considered as work progresses on their development.

3. Social Justice Pillar:

3.1 Racial Justice

DoJ RESPONSE:

- 3.1.1 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.
- 3.1.2 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

TEO RESPONSE:

The Racial Equality Strategy:

- 3.1.3 The Racial Equality Strategy 2015 - 2025, published in December 2015, provides a framework to ensure that all Executive departments make good on our commitment to making this a place where people can live, learn, socialise and work together regardless of race or ethnicity. As stated in the strategy:

"We should be under no illusion about the size of the challenge involved in tackling racial inequalities. It will require our public services to rethink all aspects of how they deliver public services. This will require time, effort and resources. But this should benefit all who live here".

- 3.1.4 As the Strategy covers the period 2015 – 2025, implementation will be ongoing throughout and we continue to make good progress on the key actions specifically:
- The structures to support delivery, including the Racial Equality Subgroup (to act as the voice of minority ethnic people) and Racial Equality Champions in each Department, are now in place. They are developing a joint work programme and approach.
 - A review of the Race Relations (NI) Order and relevant aspects of other legislation is underway.
 - Without ethnic monitoring, Government departments and agencies will find it difficult to identify gaps and monitor whether racial equality work is having any impact. Research into monitoring, which also includes the potential for amendments to our Fair Employment legislation, has just been completed and we are considering the draft report to inform future proposals. Ethnic monitoring can be defined as the process used to collect, store and analyse data about people's ethnic background. This

underpinning system is critical to achieving racial equality, monitoring service usage and ensuring that services are meeting users' needs. There is growing evidence of a disproportionately high number of BAME deaths from COVID-19 in England and Wales which reinforces the need to gather evidence here to fully identify the extent of racial inequalities. Our work on ethnic monitoring will support the establishment of an improved evidence base.

- A review of the delivery model for the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF), a key element of our policy for racial equality and good race relations, is due to complete in the coming weeks. The findings will inform the future operation of the Fund.
- Work with the Department of Education (DE) to identify ways to tackle racist bullying in schools is underway. This is supported by the sub group who are also engaging with the PSNI to agree actions to increase identification and monitoring of race hate crime.
- Work is also underway to finalise a draft Refugee Integration Strategy for all refugees and asylum seekers which we hope to consult on later this year.
- The Racial Equality Indicators Baseline Report was published in November 2018 and presents data measuring the progress of the Racial Equality Strategy. We are pleased that the report shows headway made in a number of areas but appreciate that there is more to do and we will continue to work to fully implement the actions in the strategy. The report can be found at: <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/racial-equality-indicator-baseline-report-2014-17.pdf>.
- A second report was due to be published earlier this year. Due to the pandemic, publication has had to be delayed.

Detention Centre closure and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):

- 3.1.5 Information relating to immigration and detention centres would be a matter for the home office and the Racial Equality Unit would be unable to provide input as this is an excepted matter for Westminster.
- 3.1.6 In relation to the issue of NRPF this is an issue for the Home Office but I would note that Ministers have previously challenged and will continue to challenge aspects of national policy on immigration where these have particular consequences here or appear to depart from human rights standards.
- 3.1.7 TEO engage with the Home Office on asylum policy bilaterally and through channels such as open consultation and the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership to highlight issues that we can see affecting asylum seekers here.

3.1.8 We recognise that the very limited support provided to asylum seekers together with the ban on working means that they are severely restricted in what they can do and who they can meet outside the home. This can prevent asylum seekers from making the social links needed for integration. The impacts continue to be felt by those who have had their refugee status recognised.

Ethnic Monitoring:

3.1.9 At present the current absence of robust, reliable statistical or administrative data and analysis of those data mean there are gaps in the knowledge base. The introduction of ethnic monitoring across the board could do much to fill these gaps which is why the strategy committed us to examine where it should be introduced.

3.1.10 A proper system of ethnic monitoring could allow service providers to:

- Identify possible inequalities;
- Investigate their underlying causes; and
- Remove any unfairness or disadvantage.

3.1.11 To fulfil the commitment in the strategy we have taken steps to progress this important work.

3.1.12 To progress this issue, the Racial Equality Unit obtained the assistance of an Assembly Researcher. The overall aim was to conduct a scoping exercise to determine how to go about introducing ethnic / equality monitoring to The Executive Office (TEO), wider NI Civil Service, and all other relevant public authorities in Northern Ireland.

3.1.13 Upon receipt of the final report officials will consider options and take forward with Ministers.

3.1.14 You will appreciate that we will need to engage other departments and agencies in developing options for consideration by Ministers and we will of course want to consult on any planned action which we would very much encourage all to engage in.

3.2 Politics, Public Life, Peacebuilding and Decision Making

DAERA RESPONSE:

3.2.1 Although climate change is referenced in the list of strategies the recommendations do not seem to be relevant to DAERA.

DfC RESPONSE:

3.2.2 The Department funds the Women's Regional Consortium under its Regional Infrastructure Support Programme in recognition of the specific needs of women and women's organisations. The four high level policy outcomes are:

- Organisations serving the needs of women living in disadvantaged areas and rural areas, have access to the specialist support they require to function effectively and efficiently;
- The VCS, including women's organisations, is supported in making a valued and effective contribution to policy development across Government specific to women living and working in disadvantaged areas and rural areas;
- There is increased participation and improved community development/engagement amongst women from all disadvantaged communities and in rural areas; and
- There are improved working relationships, better collaboration and more effective partnerships, pertaining to the specific interests and needs of women from disadvantaged areas and rural women's needs, across the VCS and Government.

3.2.3 A consultation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (including the women's strand) took place in 2016 and it was anticipated that a new programme would launch in 2017. However, due to absence of Ministers the new programme was unable to launch. Any new programme of support to be taken forward will be considered within the wider context of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2.4 The Minister is committed to the delivery of the suite of Social Inclusion Strategies listed in New Decade, New Approach. This will be a key priority for the Department in the coming weeks and months.

3.2.5 The Social Inclusion Strategies will be progressed using a co-design approach based on the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement. Embedding these principles at the outset of the Strategies will ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders at all stages of the process, from initial development through to monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

3.2.6 Adopting a common approach across the development of the Anti-Poverty, Disability, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Active Ageing and Child Poverty Strategies will support collaboration within the Department and across other NICS departments. This will help to reflect the intersectional nature of inequality and ensure that the Social Inclusion Strategies are appropriately aligned.

3.2.7 The new Gender Strategy will be the primary mechanism for meeting our international commitments including CEDAW.

3.2.8 The successful implementation of the Strategy development process will hinge on how effectively each Strategy can influence and shape the development of relevant policies across all departments. Whilst DfC is the lead department on taking forward the development of these Strategies, they are cross-cutting and will require significant contributions from the other departments.

DoH RESPONSE:

3.2.9 The Department of Health is committed to New Decade, New Approach and has confirmed support for the Minister for Communities in progressing development of strategies including:

- An Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- A Disability Strategy;
- A Gender Strategy;
- A Sexual Orientation Strategy;
- An Active Ageing Strategy; and
- A Child Poverty Strategy.

3.2.10 See input above on Women with Caring Responsibilities and Dependents.

3.2.11 Regarding consultation with women's groups, any group wishing to be notified of DoH consultations should submit contact details (preferably e-mail address) to Equality@health-ni.gov.uk and ask to be added to the consultation list.

DE RESPONSE:

Childcare Support and Recovery (April – August 2020):

3.2.12 The Department of Education has worked closely with the Department of Health to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, and, accordingly, launched the £12m Covid-19 Childcare Support Scheme, to address concerns surrounding the viability of childcare providers. The Scheme allowed the provision of childcare for the children of key workers (in accordance with the Department of Health key worker definition) and vulnerable children. This Scheme supported childcare providers from April to the end of June: settings who remained open; childminders who continued to operate; those providing childcare in workers' homes through an Approved Home Childcare Scheme; and a sustainability measure for those settings forced to close.

3.2.13 The Executive has recognised the need for childcare provision to support economic recovery. Some of the actions taken to help achieve this include:

- On 18 June 2020, the Minister for Education announced the Childcare Recovery Plan.
- From 29 June, the definition of keyworker has no longer applied for access to childcare.
- On 30 June, the Executive announced £10.5m to support childcare recovery. The focus of the Fund is to support more childcare providers who are open and more to re-open during July and August. The Childcare Recovery Fund was launched on 27 July and covers the period 1 July to 31 August.
- On 1 August, the Department of Health announced further relaxation of restrictions in terms of numbers for childcare providers in line with public health advice.

3.2.14 The Childcare Recovery Plan can be accessed at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/COVID-19%20Childcare%20Recovery%20Plan.pdf>.

3.2.15 More information on the Childcare Recovery Support Fund can be accessed at: <https://www.early-years.org/childcare-recovery-support-fund>.

DoJ RESPONSE:

3.2.16 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.

3.2.17 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

TEO RESPONSE:

3.2.18 As above relating to Racial Equality Strategy.

3.2.19 The Executive has agreed a twin-track approach. Firstly, a short-term activity based recovery programme is to be developed as the basis for driving economic, health and societal recovery, which will continue for the remainder of 2020/21; and secondly, a new strategic Programme for Government is to be developed for commencement from April 2021.

3.2.20 The Executive is committed to the production of an inclusive programme, based on equality principles and which respects and reflects the needs of all individuals and communities.

3.2.21 An extensive stakeholder engagement and consultation process is being planned to facilitate citizen engagement and co-design.

3.2.22 The principles of equal opportunity are vital to good public policy and decision-making, and the Programme for Government, Budget and supporting strategies are all subject to equality impact assessment under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The purpose being to assist policy decision makers take account of the needs and effects of a particular policy on people within the various section 75 groups, including people of different gender.

3.3 Restorative Justice

DoJ RESPONSE:

3.3.1 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.

3.3.2 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

3.4 Digital Divide and Access Poverty

3.4.1 The Permanent Secretary, DfE will write to you directly and separately in respect of this.

3.5 No Recourse to Public Funds / Immigration

3.5.1 Information relating to immigration and detention centres would be a matter for The Home Office and the Racial Equality Unit would be unable to provide input as this is an excepted matter for Westminster.

4. Cultural Pillar:

4.1 Women and Girls in the Media, Rape Culture and Violence Against Women

DfC RESPONSE:

4.1.1 Although these are primarily matters for the Department of Justice, we expect that they will be considered in the development of the cross-cutting Gender Strategy and Sexual Orientation Strategy under *New Decade, New Approach*.

DoJ RESPONSE:

4.1.2 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.

4.1.3 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

4.2 Hate Crimes and Online Abuse

DfC RESPONSE:

4.2.1 Although these are primarily matters for the Department of Justice, we expect that they will be considered in the development of the cross-cutting Gender Strategy and Sexual Orientation Strategy under *New Decade, New Approach*.

DoJ RESPONSE:

4.2.2 Naomi Long, the Minister of Justice, had correspondence from the Women's Policy Group (WPG) in advance of publication of the Feminist Recovery Plan (FRP). The WPG advised that a further document would follow setting out the specific DoJ recommendations and the Minister has indicated that she would meet with the WPG to discuss those recommendations in more detail.

4.2.3 In the meantime, consideration is being given to the recommendations within the FRP that fall within the responsibility of the DoJ. Although that process has not concluded, DoJ officials are content to attend the next meeting of the APG.

4.3 Education and Training

DfC RESPONSE:

4.3.1 While lead responsibility lies with DE (also DfE and DAERA and maybe others), we expect that education for women, girls and LGBT people will be considered in the development of the cross-cutting Gender Strategy and Sexual Orientation Strategy under *New Decade, New Approach*.

DE RESPONSE:

The Northern Ireland curriculum:

4.3.2 The flexibility of the Northern Ireland curriculum encourages inclusivity and enables young people to explore and learn about the importance of all forms of discrimination. The curriculum design allows schools and teachers to update and align curricular learning to reflect evolving societal requirements. Schools and teachers can also choose to deliver sensitive and important aspects at a time when they are the subject of national debate and when young people can make explicit connections between what they are learning in school and what is happening in the real world.

4.3.3 Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) is a statutory area of learning in the primary curriculum. Learning for Life and Work (LLW) is a statutory area of learning in the post-primary curriculum. Diversity, inclusion, citizenship and sustainable development are covered under these high areas of learning.

4.3.4 Sexuality and gender equality are covered under Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) which falls under PDMU at primary level and LLW at post-primary level.

4.3.5 Whilst PDMU and LLW are mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that an age appropriate, comprehensive programme is delivered. Beyond the statutory minimum content, as in all areas of learning across the curriculum, schools and teachers have the flexibility to decide the topics and approaches that best suit their pupils.

4.3.6 The Department requires all grant-aided schools to develop their own policies on how they will address issues such as diversity and inclusion and RSE within the curriculum. The school's policy should reflect the school's ethos and should be subject to consultation with parents and pupils and endorsed by the Board of Governors.

4.3.7 Schools are held accountable for the quality of the provision which they deliver by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), through its inspection of child protection and safeguarding policies and practices. As part of ETI's inspection process they routinely check the school's current policies.

4.3.8 At primary level, pupils have the opportunity to explore topics such as:

- human rights and social responsibility;
- valuing and celebrating cultural difference and diversity;
- appropriate terminology and language;
- tackling gender stereotypes;
- similarities and difference between people;
- challenging homophobic and transphobic or any other type of bullying;
- respect for others; and
- living as members of the community.

4.3.9 At post-primary level, pupils have the opportunity to explore topics such as:

- diversity and inclusion;
- local and global citizenship;
- democracy and active participation;
- LGBTQ+ Identity and Terminology;
- how to challenge bullying behaviour;
- gender identity;
- LGBTQ+ History and Pride; and
- Gender in different cultures.

4.3.10 To support schools in delivery of all areas of learning across the Northern Ireland curriculum the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) develops and produces a range of curricular guidance and teaching support materials. In developing these resources CCEA take into account any relevant legislation.

4.3.11 In 2019, CCEA launched an RSE Hub to provide easy access for teachers and pupils to range of up to date relevant resources and sources of support on a number of key priority issues. In 2020/21, the Department provided further RSE funding to CCEA. This will support the development of an RSE curriculum progression framework for each key stage and development of teacher professional learning opportunities to support strategic development of RSE teaching in NI Schools.

Initial Teacher Training:

- 4.3.12 Each Higher Education Institution (HEI) in NI currently develops the syllabus for each of its BEd or PGCE courses. Each of these Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses is structured to provide students with the broad knowledge and skills they require to teach the NI curriculum, and to establish the teaching competences and values set out by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI).
- 4.3.13 The GTCNI competences were set at a high level to enable local schools, HEIs and other stakeholders to adapt these to their individual needs. Equality was however one of the core values underpinning their creation. Equality is specifically encompassed in GTCNI Competences 1, 2, 8, and 13 and forms an important consideration in many of the other competences GTCNI have identified. As such, all ITE students trained in NI already receive a broad grounding in the importance of equality, diversity and mutual respect.
- 4.3.14 The HEIs report that they all monitor their graduates / newly qualified teachers (NQTs) as they start to work in NI schools (even if this is only initially in providing sub-cover) and if they get feedback from the employing schools that their NQTs are struggling in any aspect of their jobs, such as meeting the needs of newcomer pupils, then the HEI reviews and adjusts its course content accordingly. The HEIs consider that this flexibility allows them to be more responsive than having any externally designed modules on specific issues.
- 4.3.15 The Department's 2016 Learning Leaders (LL) strategy sets out a vision for a system where "every teacher is a learning leader" who reflects regularly on their own teaching practice and self-identifies opportunities to develop their practice and enhance learning outcomes for their pupils. While not yet fully embedded, LL is about getting the correct structures in place to support effective career long professional development for all teachers.
- 4.3.16 Should feedback from schools or the profession point to a widespread need for greater training in Equality and Diversity, the Department will, of course, consider this carefully and work with the HEIs and the Education Authority to ensure suitable training is made available.
- 4.3.17 That said, the Education Authority already provides support, including teacher professional learning, to schools on equality and diversity in line with school development priorities and within a whole school support model. Additional information and resources to support teachers in developing learning experiences that incorporate these themes is available via the CCEA website – for example <https://ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/local-and-global-citizenship>.

Human Rights Education in schools:

- 4.3.18 A growing number of primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland have achieved or are working to achieve the UNICEF Rights Respecting School award. The Award recognises a school's achievement in putting the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice within the school and beyond. The Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) discuss the award with the pupils and what it means for them as young people and how they engage with others in their school.

Distance learning:

4.3.19 Where a school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic had focused on e-learning, developing their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provision and its use across the curriculum, it was much better placed to take on online learning on the scale required; teachers possessed the confidence and expertise to do so, and pupils were already familiar with the technology. The inverse of this situation also exists, with instances where staff training has just begun in the use of platforms such as Google Classrooms and Microsoft Teams to facilitate approaches to blended learning and training for pupils also needs to be factored in. The full impact of distance learning on all learners cannot be measured fully until pupils have returned to education and teachers can assess their learning.

Equality and Diversity Training:

4.3.20 The Equality and Human Rights department of the Education Authority (EA) provide training on Diversity and Inclusion as part of the 'First Time Principals Training Programme' and the 'Board of Governor Training Programme'.

4.3.21 They also provide ad hoc training to schools / school clusters on request.

4.3.22 The EA have recently produced guidance, a model policy and a self-assessment tool-kit for schools on embedding diversity and inclusion in schools. This was developed in partnership with school leaders and sent to schools that have requested it. It will be available in the first term 2020/2021 for all schools on the EA Website.

The Inspection Process:

4.3.23 Inspectors consider and evaluate how schools are addressing equality and diversity within the area of care and welfare. Inspectors may observe lessons in and review the curriculum for personal development in post-primary schools and personal development and mutual understanding in primary schools.

4.3.24 Inspectors also meet with pupils to discuss aspects of safeguarding, care and welfare. Pupils have an opportunity to provide their views through pupil questionnaires in post-primary 9 and in year 7 in primary schools.

4.3.25 Any concerns raised by pupils regarding equality and diversity will be followed up by the inspection team and can provide evidence for the team when evaluating the impact of care and welfare on learning, teaching and outcomes.

4.3.26 The ETI Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) is common to all phases inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

<https://www.etini.gov.uk/articles/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef>).

4.3.27 Each phase is supported by characteristics of effective practice and self-evaluation questions that are phase specific. It is designed to promote an inclusive learning environment where all learners have access to high quality provision.

4.3.28 The ISEF is used for inspection and as a tool for schools to in self-evaluation and promoting improvement. There are a number of indicators of effective practice that address equality and diversity including:

- *The curriculum promotes social inclusivity which ensures participation in education for all children;*
- *The school has an agreed whole-school programme that addresses issues, such as, bullying, sectarianism, racism, and good relations, and is an integral part of learning and teaching and the school development plan; and*
- *Senior leaders promote the key values of equality of opportunity and diversity.*

4.3.29 These are supported by self-evaluation questions including:

- How do we know that we provide a safe and secure environment for all members of the school community?
- How do we ensure that relationships are mutually respectful, open and trusting?
- How do we ensure that all pupils are receiving the support needed to overcome potential barriers to learning?
- How do we ensure that the personal development and preventative education curriculum is effective, flexible and responsive to the needs of the pupils?

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM):

4.3.30 It is a concern that the proportion of students taking GCSE STEM subjects had declined by 6.1% in the last three years (Ref: CCEA's Annual Qualification's Insight Report 2019). At GCE level there was also a decline in 2019 of 3.1% in the uptake of STEM subjects. In 2019, women only accounted for 24% of the workforce in the STEM fields (Ref: <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/statistics/2019-workforce-statistics-one-million-women-in-stem-in-the-uk/>).

4.3.31 While the proportion of males and females taking STEM subjects at GCSE has remained consistent with roughly a 53%/47% split in favour of male students, the Chief Inspector's report 2016-18 highlighted the low progression

of female pupils to work-based learning in STEM-related vocational areas with female apprentices making up just 3% of all STEM-related apprenticeship registrations (Ref: DfE's August 2018 ApprenticeshipsNI occupancy data). The ETI has been also raising the issue of the low progression of females to STEM related careers through a range of fora, including presenting at the ETI's annual conference and meetings with the ETI's counterparts in Education Scotland and the Republic of Ireland to share information and to discuss the approaches being taking in the two jurisdictions to address gender inequality. The strategies being adopted include a range of approaches with a strong focus on the lack of good information, particularly for parents, on educational and career pathways and the impact of gender-biased careers education, advice and guidance on the progression of female pupils to careers in STEM.

School Improvement:

- 4.3.32 The Department's school improvement policy 'Every School a Good School' (ESaGS) sets out the vision for a high quality education system with a focus on raising standards across all schools and addressing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged.
- 4.3.33 'Every School a Good School' states that sustained improvement comes from within a school. The policy aims to support school leaders, boards of governors and teachers in implementing good practice in their school to address any barriers to learning that pupils might face and to improve the outcomes for all pupils.
- 4.3.34 At the core of the policy is self-evaluation leading to sustained self-improvement, combined with a commitment to identify and disseminate best practice and a formal intervention process for those schools where the quality of education provision is less than satisfactory.
- 4.3.35 The policy is centred on six key areas which encompass the work of policy teams across the department:
- (i) Effective leadership (including governor training and support);
 - (ii) Supporting and facilitating high quality teaching (including teacher professional development and the use of school development days);
 - (iii) Tackling barriers to learning (SEN, Newcomer, Traveller, health and wellbeing);
 - (iv) Self-evaluation and self-assessment to effect improvement;
 - (v) Support to schools and more formal interventions (including formal intervention process) and
 - (vi) Increasing engagement between schools and parents/ families and communities.

4.3.36 The Department has recently established a School Quality Policy Group to consider a number of issues related to school evaluation including a shared understanding of the qualities of an effective school and an agreed approach to managing school-level risk for the purpose of school improvement.

4.3.37 As part of this work we are developing a resource for schools to signpost them to relevant policy legislation, advice and guidance and online toolkits relevant to the indicators set out in Every School a Good School.

4.3.38 This resource recognises the importance of schools promoting the key values of equality, good relations and diversity and the need for teachers to use flexible learning and teaching strategies that respond to the diversity within the classroom and build upon the interests, needs, circumstances and prior learning of pupils.

5. Brexit and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland:

5.1 Brexit and the Impact on Women: Rights at Risk

TEO RESPONSE:

- 5.1.1 Negotiations are the responsibility of the UK Government.
- 5.1.2 The UK has committed, in Article 2(1) of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, to ensure that the UK's withdrawal from the EU will not lead to any diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland, as set out in the 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity' chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998.
- 5.1.3 As you know, this chapter includes specific provision in respect of gender equality. This commitment has effect in domestic law by virtue of section 5 of the Withdrawal Agreement Act 2020.
- 5.1.4 A dedicated mechanism will be provided by the NIHRC and ECNI to monitor, report and enforce this commitment.

5.2 Good Friday Agreement legislation, New Decade, New Approach and a Bill of Rights

TEO RESPONSE:

- 5.2.1 The New Decade, New Approach document states that an Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee will be established to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights that is faithful to the stated intention of the 1998 Agreement in that it contains rights supplementary to those contained in the European Convention on Human Rights, which are currently applicable and "that reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland"; as well as reflecting the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem.
- 5.2.2 On Monday 24th February 2020 the Assembly resolved that, as provided for in Standing Order 53(1), this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the creation of a bill of rights as set out in paragraph 28 of part 2 of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document; and to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 February 2022.
- 5.2.3 As set out in the New Decade New Approach document, a Panel of Experts to assist the Ad-Hoc Committee will be selected by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. Ministers will select the five Panel members from a list of local and international human rights experts drawn up by officials.
- 5.2.4 The Panel should initially seek to advise the Ad-Hoc Committee on what constitutes our "particular circumstances" drawing upon, but not bound by, previous work on a Bill of Rights and should review and make

recommendations on how the UK's withdrawal from the EU may impact on our "particular circumstances".

- 5.2.5 The appointment process was developed by officials taking account of the expertise required to provide the research and assistance to the Ad Hoc Committee; the timeline for the work; the commitment that may be required and the current pandemic. In respect of the process, there was consultation with officials in the office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Bill of Rights outside government. The Committee was also consulted in respect of the personal description and terms of reference for panel members' work.
- 5.2.6 Officials are currently progressing the appointment process and it is anticipated that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will select the 5 panel members soon.

5.3 Northern Ireland Bill of Rights

TEO RESPONSE:

- 5.3.2 Whilst the devolved administrations have a responsibility to implement and monitor human rights obligations, development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is an excepted matter and is, therefore, the responsibility of the UK Government.
- 5.3.3 As part of the St Andrews Agreement in 2006, the UK Government committed to the setting up of a forum to help build consensus on a Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights Forum was inaugurated in December 2006 and was chaired by Chris Sidoti, an international human rights lawyer. The Bill of Rights Forum completed its report in March 2008 and the NI Human Rights Commission submitted its advice on a Bill of Rights to the Secretary of State in December 2008.
- 5.3.4 The issue of a Bill of Rights was considered as part of the cross-party talks that led to the Stormont House Agreement. As set out in paragraph 69 of that Agreement, there is still no consensus between the Executive parties on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
- 5.3.5 The UK Government published its paper 'A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: Next Steps' for consultation from 30 November 2009 until 31 March 2010. The consultation responses were published in December 2010.

6 International Best Practice:

DfC RESPONSE:

- 6.2 The new Gender Strategy will be the primary mechanism for meeting our international commitments including CEDAW and relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG).

7 NI Assembly Recommendations:

DfC RESPONSE:

- 7.2 All of the Social Inclusion Strategies will be progressed using a co-design approach based on the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement. Embedding these principles at the outset of the Strategies will ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders at all stages of the process, from initial development through to monitoring, reporting and evaluation.
- 7.3 Adopting a common approach across the development of the Social Inclusion Strategies will support collaboration within the Department and across other NICS departments. The Minister will work closely with Executive colleagues and other departments to ensure actions are aligned to PfG outcomes and that action owners are signed up to deliver and report on their commitments within the Strategies. This will help to reflect the intersectional nature of inequality and ensure that the Social Inclusion Strategies are appropriately aligned.
- 7.4 The impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt by all sections of society, not least the most vulnerable. As work progresses on the Strategies, all available emerging evidence will be used to ensure that the Strategies include actions targeted at mitigating the medium to long term effects of the pandemic.

DoF RESPONSE:

- 7.5 DoF appreciates the call for gender budgeting.
- 7.6 The 2017 OECD report on Gender Budgeting made the point that there was no standard model of gender budgeting.
- 7.7 The Northern Ireland Budgeting system is an equality-informed resource allocation system, whereby decision-makers are informed of potential equality implications, including those related to gender, prior to final decisions being made on the Budget.
- 7.8 There is a statutory basis for our approach to equality, and difficult to see how we could justify prioritising one area over another.
- 7.9 However, NICS officials have been actively engaging with a Ulster University study on the role of gender budgeting in tackling gender inequalities led by Professor Joan Ballantine from the Department of Finance, Accounting and

Economics and Professor Ann Marie Gray from the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences.

7.10 This work will be crucial in understanding how aspects of gender budgeting might be used to secure improved outcomes for specific programmes.

8 UK Government Recommendations:

DfC RESPONSE:

8.2 These relate to reserved or accepted matters and as such are outside the remit of Executive Departments.

DoF RESPONSE:

8.3 In terms of the specific recommendations in Chapter Eight of the report, we would be supportive of the actions mentioned, namely that the UK Government should:

- Address the funding shortfalls in Northern Ireland beyond the Barnett consequential allocations;
- Provide alternatives to austerity;
- Introduce a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights;
- Negotiate a Brexit deal which will benefit Northern Ireland; and
- Take measures to ensure recovery plans for COVID-19 dismantle the deep systemic inequalities that exist across the UK rather than exacerbate them.

September 2020