

DoF Screening template

Screening is the first of two methods by which the necessary level of “regard” is demonstrated as being paid to the statutory equality goal, as set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The DoF Equality Scheme commits us to screening our policies. This includes our strategies and plans, policies, legislative developments; and new ways of working such as – the introduction, change or end of an existing service, procedure, policy etc.

This screening template is designed to help business areas consider the likely equality and human rights impacts of their proposed decisions on different groups of customers, service users, staff and visitors.

Detailed information about the Section 75 equality duties and what they mean in practice is available on the Equality Commission’s website:
<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened, should be ‘signed off’ and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made accessible on the DoF website as soon as possible following completion and made available in alternative formats on request.

All Section 75 consultees should be advised of the screening exercise once the final policy decision has been taken.

The screening template has 4 sections to complete. These are:

Section A - details about the policy / decision that is being screened.

Section B - 4 key questions that require you to outline the likely impacts on equality groups, and all supporting evidence.

Section C - 4 key questions in relation to obligations under the Disability Discrimination Order and the Human Rights Act.

Section D - the formal record of the screening decision.

SECTION A

Information about the policy

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

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

Is this a new or revised policy?

New

a) Name of the policy

Land & Property Services (LPS) Public Counter Availability Policy

b) Brief Description of the policy

LPS is currently undertaking a review of public counter operating hours to ensure that service provision remains efficient, effective, and aligned with evolving customer needs.

At present, LPS operates five public counters located strategically across Northern Ireland (Belfast, Omagh, Derry/Londonderry, Ballymena, and Craigavon) to ensure accessibility. These counters provide face-to-face support, relating to Revenue and Benefits and Land Registry services.

The Belfast public counter is based in Lanyon Plaza in Belfast. Its current opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. This

policy proposes to reduce the Belfast counter opening hours to Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1pm.

The four regional public counters currently offer in-person customer support daily from Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 1.00pm. This policy will reduce public counter opening days in the regional offices to two per week. Opening days in each of the regional offices will be rotated (as per the below table) so that it will be possible for customers to travel to other regional offices on their designated opening day.

REGIONAL OFFICE	PUBLIC COUNTER OPEN	PUBLIC COUNTER OPEN
BALLY MENA	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
DERRY - L/DERRY	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
CRAIGAVON	TUESDAY	FRIDAY
OMAGH	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
HOURS	9.30am - 1.30pm	9.30am - 1.30pm

c) Aims of the policy/ Rationale behind the changes

The policy is designed to support the ongoing digital transformation within LPS.

Many Rates and Benefits services are already available through the Rates Online public portal which launched in January 2026. The number of services offered is continuing to increase with the roll-out of functionality to enable ratepayers to submit application forms for the various rate reliefs that LPS administers.

Land Registry is embarking on a digital transformation journey and is developing a new digital solution designed to provide customers with a more efficient and accessible services through the introduction of digital and electronic channels.

The transition toward digital services is expected to gradually influence customer behaviour, reducing reliance on physical attendance. This policy aims to support this transition by preparing LPS staff and

customers for this more efficient landscape by continuing to provide a face-to-face option for customers who prefer or require in-person assistance but on a reduced basis in recognition that the majority of future interactions will take place through alternative channels.

d) Who will the policy affect?

This policy will affect LPS staff and customers

e) Is this a NICS wide policy?

No

f) Who will implement the policy?

Land Registration Division in respect of the Land Registry services and Revenues & Benefits (R&B) Division in respect of rates services.

g) Will this policy or revision address an existing inequality? No

h) Will this policy or revision benefit any Section 75 categories? No

i) Will this policy or revision have an adverse differential impact upon any of the Section 75 groupings? Yes

The reduction in availability of face-to-face services at the Belfast counter may have some adverse impact on LPS customers who are older and those who have a disability. This may particularly be the case where older people and people with a disability have to travel a distance to visit the Belfast counter. The reduction in hours may make it difficult for them to attend, factors which may make this difficult include distance to travel and travel times, availability of public or private transport and any requirement for assistance to travel.

The reduction in opening days of the regional public counters is likely to have a more minor impact Land Registry customers as Land Registry only offer a very limited service from these offices i.e. the ability to order a copy folio and map. This service is currently provided by Revenue & Benefits staff.

The proposed policy may have an adverse impact on LPS customers who speak English as a second language or who have limited understanding of English as they may find it easier to access LPS services on a face-to-face basis.

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence / information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Set out all evidence below along with details of the different Section 75 groups you have met and / or consulted with to help inform your screening assessment. Please also provide details of priorities and needs identified for each Section 75 group.

- **Religious belief**

The 2021 Census saw over 42% of the NI population identify as Roman Catholic and 37% as Protestant. 19% reported as being of no religion; less than 2% identified as being of other religions.

[Northern Ireland: population distribution by religion 1861-2021 | Statista](#)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Political opinion**

The NI Life and Times Survey 2018 found that 26% describe themselves as Unionist, 21% as Nationalist and 50% as Neither.

[NI Life and Times Survey - 2018 : UNINATID \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://ark.ac.uk/NI-Life-and-Times-Survey-2018)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Racial group**

The 2021 Census found that 96.55% of the NI population state their ethnic origin to be white and 3.45% stated they were of an ethnic minority.

[Census 2021 - Briefing \(equalityni.org\)](https://equalityni.org/Census-2021-Briefing)

This policy proposal may have an adverse impact on LPS customers who speak English as a second language or who have limited understanding of English, who prefer to access LPS services face-to-face as availability of this service will be reduced.

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups.

- **Age**

The 2021 Census found the ages of the NI population to be:

0-14 – 19%
15-39 – 31%
40-64 – 32%
65-84 – 15%
85+ – 2%

[Census 2021 Population and household estimates for Northern Ireland Statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://nisra.gov.uk/Census-2021-Population-and-household-estimates-for-Northern-Ireland-Statistical-bulletin)

This policy proposal may have an adverse impact on LPS customers in the older age groups, who are more reliant on accessing support through face-to-face services than clients in the younger age groups.

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups.

- **Marital status**

The 2021 Census found that 38% of the NI population identified as single, 45.6% as married, 0.2% in a civil partnership, 3.8% as separated, 6% as divorced and 6.4% as widowed.

[Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Marital or civil partnership status & Household relationships \(couples\) \(qub.ac.uk\)](#)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Sexual orientation**

The 2021 Census data reported that 90% identified as heterosexual, 7.9% gave no response, 1.2% reported as gay or lesbian, 0.7% as bisexual, 0.2% as other.

[Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Sexual orientation \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Men & women generally**

The 2021 Census reports 49.2% of the population is male and 50.8% is female.

[Census 2021 Population and household estimates for Northern Ireland
Statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

- **Disability**

The 2021 Census shows that 24.33% of people report their activities are hindered by a disability to some extent or other.

[census-2021-ms-d02.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

This policy proposal may have an adverse impact on LPS customers with a disability who may be more reliant on accessing support through face-to-face services than clients without disabilities.

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups.

- **Dependents**

The 2021 Census found that 30% of households in NI have dependent children.

[Census 2021 population and household estimates for Northern Ireland:
Statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

The Department has not identified any specific needs or priorities for this category in relation to this policy.

Screening questions

There are 4 essential screening questions:

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

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups to assess the level of impact, however it is anticipated that there will be a minor impact on older people, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic groups. The impact on these groups has been assessed to be minor due to face-to-face services still being available to all groups and the increase in digital services offered by LPS for all customers.

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?

No

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

None

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between these three groups?

No

Are there likely impacts on Section 75 Categories?

- **Religious belief:** No

What is the level of impact? None

- **Political opinion:** No

What is the level of impact? None

- **Racial group:** Yes. This policy proposal may have some adverse impact on LPS customers who speak English as a second language or who have limited understanding of English may be more reliant on accessing support through face-to-face services than those with English as a first language and the Department anticipates a possible adverse differential impact between these groups

What is the level of impact?

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups to assess the level of impact, however it is anticipated that any impact on this group will be a minor. The impact on this group has been assessed to be minor due to face-to-face services still being available and the increase in digital services offered by LPS for all customers.

- **Age:** Yes. This policy proposal may impact Land Registry customers in the older age groups, who are more reliant on accessing support through face-to-face services than customers in the younger age groups and the Department anticipates a possible adverse differential impact between these groups

What is the level of impact?

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups to assess the level of impact, however it is anticipated that any impact on this group will be minor. The impact on this group has been assessed to be minor due to face-to-face services still being available and the increase in digital services offered by LPS for all customers.

- **Marital status:** No

What is the level of impact? None

- **Sexual orientation:** No

What is the level of impact? None

- **Men and women generally:** No

What is the level of impact? None

- **Disability:** Yes. This policy proposal may impact LPS customers with a disability, who may be more reliant on accessing support through face-to-face services than customers without disabilities and the Department anticipates a possible adverse differential impact between these groups

What is the level of impact?

There is currently no data available on the LPS counter usage by section 75 groups to assess the level of impact, however it is anticipated that any impact on this group will be a minor. The impact on this group has been assessed to be minor due to face-to-face services still being available and the increase in digital services offered by LPS for all customers.

- **Dependants:** No

What is the level of impact? None

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

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

The Department has not identified any impacts from people with multiple identities as a result of this policy.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is ‘minor’ and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Alternatively, there may already be policies in place which would mitigate any adverse impact identified.

Mitigation measures proposed:

Mitigating measures for this proposed policy include the remaining availability of face-to-face services for all LPS customers, including those in the Section 75 groups identified. The Belfast public counter will remain open daily and the regional public counters will be available twice weekly on a rotating basis, ensuring that LPS customers who require or prefer face-to-face interactions, will still have access to this service.

Outside of the opening hours of the LPS public counter, customers will still be able to contact LPS via phone or email.

In addition, the impact of the proposed policy is mitigated by the increase in LPS services available digitally. Many Revenue and Benefits services are already available through their Rates Online, such as the ability to make a payment or submit information relating to rate accounts with more functionality to be added in the coming months, including ability to submit an application form for a rate relief. Land Registry will start to roll out new digital services in 2027 and already offers some services online, including the provision of copy folios, maps or documents which can be completed via email and paid for electronically.

It is anticipated that LPS customers in the Section 75 groups identified will avail of these existing and new online services and thereby reduce their reliance on face-to-face services.

Section C

DoF also has legislative obligations to meet under the [Disability Discrimination Order](#) and the [Human Rights Act](#) . The following questions relate to these two areas.

Consideration of Disability Duties

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity for DoF to better **promote positive attitudes** towards disabled people? No

Explain your assessment in full

The Department has not identified any opportunities to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people in relation to this policy

Does the proposed policy / decision provide an opportunity to actively **increase the participation** by disabled people in public life? No

Explain your assessment in full

The Department has not identified any opportunities to actively increase the participation by disabled people in public life have been identified in relation to this policy.

Consideration of Human Rights

The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 brings the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law and it applies in N Ireland. Articles 3 and 4 are classified as “absolute” rights ie the State can never withhold or take away these rights. All others are either “qualified” or “limited”. Further information is available via the following link

<http://www.nicshumanrightsguide.com/>

Indicate any potential adverse impacts that the policy / decision may have in relation to human rights issues.

	<u>Adverse Impact</u>	
	(delete as appropriate)	
Right to Life	Article 2	No
Prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment	Article 3	No
Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	Article 4	No
Right to liberty and security	Article 5	No
Right to a fair and public trial	Article 6	No
Right to no punishment without law	Article 7	No
Right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence	Article 8	No
Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	Article 9	No
Right to freedom of expression	Article 10	No
Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	Article 11	No

Right to marry and to found a family	Article 12	No
The prohibition of discrimination	Article 14	No
Protection of property and enjoyment of possessions	Protocol 1 Article 1	No
Right to education	Protocol 1 Article 2	No
Right to free and secret elections	Protocol 1 Article 3	No

Please indicate any ways which you consider the policy positively promotes human rights.

The Department has not identified any positive impacts on human rights in relation to this policy.

Please explain any adverse impacts on human rights that you have identified.

The Department has not identified any adverse impacts on human rights in relation to this policy.

If you have identified any adverse impacts on human rights through this screening you must complete a Human Rights Impact Assessment:
<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/human-rights-impact-assessment-proforma>.

Monitoring Arrangements

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's [Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities \(July 2007\)](#):

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75MonitoringGuidance2007.pdf>

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

To monitor the impact of the proposed changes to the opening hours of the LPS public counters, staff members working on the counters will be instructed to monitor feedback from LPS customers using the revised services and to report to the Land Registry Operations Manager for consideration in future policy development in this area.

Section D - Formal Record of Screening Decision

Title of Proposed Policy / Decision being screened:

Land & Property Services (LPS) Public Counter Availability Policy

I can confirm that the proposed policy / decision has been screened for (i) equality of opportunity, (ii) good relations disabilities duties and (iii) human rights issues

Screened Out - On the basis of the answers to the screening questions, I recommend that a full EQIA is not required, due to the minor nature of the impacts and the mitigating actions.

Provide a brief note to explain how this decision was reached:

Section 75 data is not currently available for the use of the LPS public counters, however it is anticipated that as availability of the face-to-face services is being reduced rather than removed and that an increased number of digital services are being introduced by LPS, the impact on customers in the identified Section 75 groups will be minor.

Screening assessment completed by -

Name Ciara Coughlin
Grade Deputy Principal
Date 18 June 2026

And approved by –

For Land Registry:

Name Christine Farrell
Grade Grade 5
Date 3 July 2026

For Rates and Benefits:

Name Colm O'Hagan
Grade Grade 7
Date 1 July 2026

Central Support Team notified	7 July 2026
Equality Contacts advised	8 October 2026
Screening uploaded to DoF website	8 October 2026