

## **Part 1. Policy scoping**

The first 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 process on a step by step basis.

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

### **Information about the policy**

#### **Name of the policy**

*County Court Rules Committee Consultation – Increase in Financial Jurisdiction (including consequential changes to County Court Scale Costs).*

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#### **Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?**

*Revised policy. The proposals build on existing County Court jurisdictional limits and the established system of County Court scale costs set out in the County Court Rules (Northern Ireland) 1981.*

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#### **What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)**

*The consultation proposals seek to support the Minister of Justice's intention to increase the general civil financial jurisdiction of the County Court to £60,000, the jurisdiction of District Judges to £20,000, and the defamation jurisdiction to £10,000. The proposals aim to:*

- *support proportionate allocation of cases between the High Court and County Court;*
  - *enhance access to justice by enabling a greater number of cases to be dealt with in the County Court under simpler and more cost-predictable procedures; and*
  - *maintain fair, transparent and reasonable levels of recoverable legal costs through the extension of existing County Court scale costs.*
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Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy? If so, explain how.

*The policy is not designed to benefit particular Section 75 groups. However, by facilitating greater use of the County Court's more accessible procedures and venues, there may be indirect practical benefits for court users generally, including disabled persons and persons with dependants, through potentially reduced travel, cost and complexity. The proposals apply uniformly and are not targeted at any specific group.*

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Who initiated or wrote the policy?

*The County Court Rules Committee, in light of the Minister of Justice's January 2026 announcement on increasing the County Court's financial jurisdiction.*

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Who owns and who implements the policy?

*The County Court Rules Committee owns the proposals concerning scale costs and procedural rules, under the County Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1980. Rules made by the Committee are subject to allowance by the Department of Justice following consultation with the Lady Chief Justice. Implementation would occur through amendments to the County Court Rules (Northern Ireland) 1981.*

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## Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

If yes, are they (please delete as appropriate)

Financial ✓

Legislative ✓

other, please specify

*The delivery of the policy is dependent on:*

- *legislative amendments to increase County Court jurisdictional limits;*

- *amendment and approval of County Court Rules;*
  - *alignment with Department of Justice changes to legal aid legislation; and*
  - *effective communication of the revised scales and jurisdiction to court users and practitioners.*
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## **Main stakeholders affected**

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please delete as appropriate)

Staff ✓

service users ✓

other public sector organisations

voluntary/community/trade unions

other, please specify

- *County Court Rules Committee.*
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## **Other policies with a bearing on this policy**

- what are they?
- who owns them?

## 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. The Commission has produced this guide to [signpost to S75 data](#).

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

### Religious belief evidence / information:

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
  - *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
  - *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
  - *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
  - *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*
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### Political Opinion evidence / information:

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
  - *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
  - *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
  - *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care*
  - *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*
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### Racial Group evidence / information:

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
  - *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
  - *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
  - *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
  - *Rules Committee Methodology Summary .*
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### **Age evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
  - *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
  - *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
  - *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
  - *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*
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### **Marital Status evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
- *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
- *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
- *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
- *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*

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**Sexual Orientation evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
- *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
- *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
- *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
- *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*

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**Men & Women generally evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
- *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
- *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
- *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
- *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*

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**Disability evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
- *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
- *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
- *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*

- *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*
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## **Dependants evidence / information:**

- *previous Section 75 screening exercises undertaken in 2016, 2021 and 2024 in relation to County Court scale costs and jurisdiction;*
- *NICTS Customer Exit Survey 2011;*
- *NICTS 2018 Court User Survey (civil and family users);*
- *Census 2021 data on population, age, disability, religion, ethnic group, marital status, sexual orientation and unpaid care;*
- *Rules Committee Methodology Summary.*

*These sources provide an overview of the demographic profile of court users and the wider Northern Ireland population. No evidence was identified indicating that changes to financial jurisdiction or scale costs would differentially impact any Section 75 group.*

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## **Needs, experiences and priorities**

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

*Across all Section 75 categories (religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, men and women generally, disability, dependants), available evidence does not indicate any distinct needs or priorities that would interact adversely or disproportionately with the proposed changes. The consultation proposals concern court jurisdictional limits and recoverable costs, which apply irrespective of personal characteristics.*

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

### **Religious belief**

*No evidence*

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**Political Opinion**

*No evidence*

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**Racial Group**

*No evidence*

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**Age**

*No evidence*

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**Marital status**

*No evidence*

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**Sexual orientation**

*No evidence*

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**Men and Women Generally**

*No evidence*

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## **Part 2. Screening questions**

### **Introduction**

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

### **In favour of a 'major' impact**

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are

concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;

- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

### **In favour of 'minor' impact**

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

### **In favour of none**

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

## Screening questions

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

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:

What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

### 2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories? Yes/No

*No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

**Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Racial Group - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Age - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Marital Status - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Sexual Orientation - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Men and Women generally - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Disability - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

**Dependants - If Yes, provide details:**

If No, provide reasons: *No specific opportunities have been identified. The policy is not designed as an equality intervention and is neutral in its application. It has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.*

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

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)  
What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)  
What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)  
What is the level of impact? ~~Minor~~ / ~~Major~~ / None (circle as appropriate)

*The policy is not considered likely to have any impact on good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The proposals are technical and administrative in nature.*

**4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

**Religious Belief** - If ~~Yes~~, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: *No opportunities have been identified.*

**Political Opinion** - If ~~Yes~~, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: *No opportunities have been identified.*

**Racial Group** - If ~~Yes~~, provide details:

If No, provide reasons: *No opportunities have been identified.*

## **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.

*No evidence has been identified to suggest that persons with multiple identities would be impacted differently as a result of the proposals.*

### Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

*The policy is screened **out** of the requirement for a full Equality Impact Assessment. The proposals are assessed as having **no impact** on equality of opportunity or good relations, being technical, procedural and uniformly applicable.*

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced - please provide details.

*No mitigation measures are required*

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact

assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

## 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.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

*No mitigation measures are required*

## Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been ‘**screened in**’ for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people’s daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority’s functions	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority’s Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

If yes, please provide details.

## **Part 4. Monitoring**

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

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.

*The impact of the policy will be kept under review through:*

- *consideration of consultation responses;*
- *regular review of County Court scale costs and procedures; and*
- *general monitoring of court user feedback and access to justice considerations.*

*Should evidence of adverse impact on any Section 75 group emerge, the screening decision will be revisited.*

## **Part 5 - Approval and authorisation**

Screened by: *Michael Meehan*

Position/Job Title: *G6, Head of Judicial Support, LCJO*

Date: *13.05.2026*

Approved by: *Julie McGrath*

Position/Job Title: *Secretary to the County Court Rules Committee*

Date: *14.05.2026*

Note: 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 easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.