

Written evidence submitted by Unite the union, relating to the funding and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland inquiry (FCP0035)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Unite the union welcomes this opportunity to highlight the punitive impact arising from the budgets set by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 27 April 2023 in the absence of a functioning Executive.
- 1.2** This submission will focus upon the budget allocated to three departments – the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for Communities and the Executive Office – as these have a direct relevance to significant numbers of Unite the union members and to the wider equality agenda. This submission is based largely from Unite’s submission to the consultations held by these three Departments on the impact that the imposed budget would have and quotes freely from the relevant consultation documents.
- 1.3** These three departments are responsible for the employment of public transport workers, industrial civil service workers in roads, rivers, forestry, NI Housing Executive workers (direct labour organisation), as well as community and voluntary workers in the third sector. Similar considerations apply to other departments, notably the Department of Health and the Department of Education both of which have been provided a completely inadequate budget – impacting the pay and conditions of public sector workers.
- 1.4** The Secretary of State’s budget occurs against a wider backdrop of political uncertainty and the worst cost of living crisis in generations. The funding package made available for the departments and arms-length bodies (ALBs) is very significantly less than what would be needed to maintain even the basic service level. It represents a form of ‘economic shock therapy’ seeking to collectively punish those in Northern Ireland depending on access to public services – which include some of the most

vulnerable in our society – for wider political failure. It also directly impacts workers.

2.0 Underfunding of the Department for Communities

- 2.1** The Department for Communities (DfC) has a wide range of responsibilities including the payment of benefits including child maintenance and pensions; advice and support for those seeking employment or unable to work; provision of good quality and affordable housing; encouraging diversity and participation in society and promoting social inclusion; providing support for children; supporting regeneration, delivering neighbourhood renewal and tackling disadvantage in the most deprived areas; promoting sports and leisure; supporting local government and the community and voluntary sector; the maintenance of museums and libraries and the delivery of the Appeals Service. Given such a focus, inadequate funding for this department have a hugely disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable and their human rights.
- 2.2** DfC identified that it would require an additional resource funding of £97.9 million for the coming year – over and beyond that in 2022-23. In order to progress existing Ministerial priorities a further £375m would be required and to meet its capital investment plans a further capital fund of £275.1m would be required in 2023-24.
- 2.3** The funding package determined unilaterally by the Secretary of State was inadequate to meet these additional pressures. The shortfall on non-ring fenced resource funding was £111.2m or 15.5%; the gap for capital funds provided was £59m or 27.3%. No provision to fund the £375 million in Ministerial priorities was included at all – and these include funding for Welfare mitigations.
- 2.4** Combined with this punitive budget settlement, the Department has been provided ‘flexibility’ in the repayment of the ‘overspend’ of £297m in 2022-23. This expenditure was provided to meet chronic need arising in that year but the requirement for it to be ‘repaid’ albeit over a slightly

longer timeframe will only further impact the ability of the Department to meet need.

- 2.5 The funding package provided to DfC is so inadequate that the Department itself warned that 'some of the decisions required...may be outside the scope of the [Northern Ireland (Interim Arrangements)] bill and cannot be taken by civil servants'. This is because the decisions would have such a detrimental impact that they would be unlawful to be decided upon within even the augmented competencies afforded to Permanent Secretaries by the Interim Arrangements bill. This statement is a testament to the inhuman consequences that such underfunding public services will have but also evidenced the unprecedented nature of the current budget.

Equality Impact Response

- 3.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1997) mandates government bodies to have due regard for the promotion of equality between those of different religious beliefs, coming from different racial groups, of different ages, with different marital status, of different sexual orientations, between men and women generally, with or without dependents and with different political opinions.
- 3.2 It also requires such bodies to have due regard for the desirability of good relations between people of different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups.
- 3.3 The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 applied new duties requiring public authorities to have due regard for the promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage participation by disabled people in public life.
- 3.4 The budget allocated to DfC is inadequate to meet arising need. In addition, the requirement for the 2022-23 'overspend' of £297m to be repaid will impose a very heavy burden on the Department's budget into the future.

- 3.5 While ring-fenced resource DEL increased slightly (1.4%) it did not rise to take account of inflationary pressures. This budget covers commitments such as Welfare Mitigations, Housing Benefit Rates and Debt Advice – which will suffer a real-terms squeeze.
- 3.6 Non-ring fenced DEL fell in nominal terms by 1.9% from £715.5m to £702.1m and this was before inflation or the additional Resource requirement identified by the Department of £97.9m. As such, this amounts to a nominal-terms funding gap of £111.2m or 15% - and that is before inflationary pressures are factored in. As the document states ‘managing a resource shortfall of this scale will undoubtedly have a significant and adverse impact on the Department’s ability to deliver public services’.
- 3.7 Overall, the budget announced by the Secretary of State will leave Resource DEL allocated for DfC £290m or 30.9% lower than it was in 2011-12.
- 3.8 Given that 90% of DfC’s resource funding requirement relates to areas of protected, contractual, inescapable or statutory spend – the impact on the remaining discretionary 10% is particularly dire.
- 3.9 Regardless of flexibilities which might be achieved, requiring the overspend to be repaid will only further add pressure on unsustainable DfC budgets. Given that DfC has an overarching focus on providing services and support to the most vulnerable and deprived such a generalised underfunding will have a disproportionate impact on these groups – which include many if not most of the disadvantaged groups offered protections under Section 75 or the DDO.
- 3.10 No resource DEL whatsoever has been provided to fund Ministerial priorities costed at £375m for the year which include new Welfare Mitigations, an uplift to funding for Supporting People programme or replacement of the European Social Fund supports. This means that none of these programmes will proceed: with a dramatic impact on those dependent on benefits or for additional housing supports.

- 3.11** NI retains a high proportion of children living in poverty; the failure to extend protections including the scrapping of the 'two-child' restriction on payments will have a deleterious impact on child poverty rates as there is known to be a direct correlation between number of children in a household and poverty rates [Source: ECP AHC local child poverty statistics; HMRC]. The impact will also likely be greater on children in single-parent families, in households with no one working or from BME backgrounds.
- 3.12** These decisions required to live within budget have the potential to have profound impacts in terms of social and economic exclusion, especially for those with disabilities. The reduction to the Rates Support Grant will have a clear rural-urban impact and reduce regional equality.
- 3.13** The table overleaf provides a summary of Unite's concerns in relation to policy decisions being considered by DfC.
- 3.14** Not included in this table are the actions already taken by DfC in the last budgetary period i.e. in 2022-23. These include reduction of the Rates Support Grant to councils by £3m; no funding for Covid Recovery schemes for Culture, Arts & Heritage, Sport and Community/Voluntary sectors; no additional investment in Employment Programmes (despite Northern Ireland's long-term higher levels of economic inactivity and the largest disability employment gap in the UK); and no funding for Executive commitments to social inclusion strategies. The inadequacy of resource funding provided will mean that these measures will not only remain in place but are likely to become worse.

Summary of Equality Concerns: Resource DEL underfunding

Policy	Equality Impact	Equality Groups adversely affected
Social Security Delivery: Universal Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curtailed recruitment (initiated 2022-23) will continue leading to insufficient staff cover which will cause 'delays in benefit payments' and place 'working age customers in financial hardship'. - Likelihood of slippage on lower priority areas e.g. 'debt referrals' and 'put at risk the Department's ability to safeguard public funds'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups disproportionately dependent on UC. That includes those with dependents, with disabilities, migrant workers, different age-groups, men-women and religious/political beliefs. - Likely that impact will be greatest in rural areas where pressures will be greatest.
Social Security Delivery: Move to Universal Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staffing shortages resulting from continued recruitment freeze means 'significant risk that if working age customers are not moved on to UC, they will lose their access to welfare support'. - Risk that 'Department could become liable for the full IT costs associated with the maintenance and running of HMRC's National Tax Credit system and DWP legacy benefit systems'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups disproportionately dependent on UC. That includes those with dependents, with disabilities, migrant workers, different age-groups, men-women and religious/political beliefs. - Likely that impact will be greatest in rural areas where pressures will be greatest.
Social Security Delivery: Health Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To maintain parity of social security delivery, DfC's Health Transformation Programme will transition separate assessments into an integrated service with one supplier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those receiving sickness or disability based payments. Necessarily this will have an adverse impact on those with disabilities, older persons and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the increase in health-related benefit claims remains unfunded there will be a 'fundamental impact' on customers, particularly those with 'a disability or health condition or older people'. - Impacts to include diminished service, backlogs, waiting times and 'possibility of benefits not being received by some of the most vulnerable in our society'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - differentially on religious/political beliefs. - Likely that impact will be greatest in rural areas where pressures will be greatest
Social Security Delivery: Office Opening Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Options being considered is closing SSOs one day a week to save on overheads and reducing 'the overall size of the DfC estate'. - Potential impacts include reduced access and risk to DfC responsibilities to deliver 'benefits and pensions to vulnerable people, including those with a disability and older people who may require more face-to-face support'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups disproportionately dependent on social security payments. That includes those with dependents, with disabilities, migrant workers, different age-groups, men-women and religious/political beliefs. - Likely that impact will be greatest in rural areas where pressures will be greatest.
Social Security Delivery: Laptop Replacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inability to replace laptops more than three years old. - May pose 'a considerable risk to social security operational benefit delivery' – including 'ability to pay all customers and maintain parity of social security with GB'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups with higher dependent on social security payments. That includes those with dependents, with disabilities, migrant workers, different age-groups, men-women and religious/political beliefs. - Likely that impact will be greatest in rural areas where pressures will be greatest.
Discretionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand for this grant has risen x4 during cost of living crisis to almost £40 m. Budget available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups who would have a higher propensity to seek a

<p>Support Grants</p>	<p>for this will be considerably less.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While grants will remain available ‘reductions will be applied through reducing number of times and/or circumstances’ help is made available. - DfC recognise the constrained budget will ‘curtail its ability to support any vulnerable individual or family facing financial hardship’, - Capital funded hardship loans will continue but also be subject to constraints. - ‘Scaling back grant awards will put at risk DfC’s ability to address the basic needs of people who present with hardship, particularly those with dependents, older people and those with a disability’. 	<p>discretionary support. That includes those with dependents, with disabilities, migrant workers, different age-groups, men-women and religious/political beliefs.</p>
<p>Employment Support: Labour Market Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding for LMPs (delivered through local councils) will be paused from July 2023. - This will impact economically inactive, long-term unemployed, youth unemployed, those with disabilities and potentially impact supply of skilled labour. - There will be adverse impact across S75 groups, especially combined with loss of ESF funding. ‘LMPs help those seeking work but also are a critical intervention to help people with a disability or health condition to remain in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will impact those groups who benefited most from the LMPs. That includes those with disabilities, those of working-age, women seeking to re-enter the labour market and will impact differentially across religious/political beliefs.

	work’.	
Arm’s Length Bodies: 5% cut to budget of NIHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to impact ‘ability to deliver better homes and support people into independent living’. - DfC foresee adverse impacts across S75 groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut is in addition to the capital funding cut impacting new builds for Social Housing (see below). Will disproportionately impact those with dependents, with disabilities, in early working age (higher rates of homelessness), women at risk of domestic violence or abuse and LGBT persons who exhibit higher rates of homelessness.
Arm’s Length Bodies: 5% cut to budget of Arts Council NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cuts to budget for Arts Council NI will have greater impact as this comes on back of 30% underfunding over last decade. - Evidence of ‘long-standing disparity in per capita investment in the Arts’ compared to rest of UK/ Ireland. Reduced funding will damage delivery by and sustainability of arts and cultural organisations. - Jobs lost, venues/ facilities/ groups may close. Impacts on social inclusion/ tackling poverty/ enhancing well-being/ community wealth building/ life opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will disproportionately restrict access to arts or cultural activities for those from deprived areas, with disabilities, older people or migrant workers/ethnic minorities.
Arm’s Length Bodies: 5% cut to budget of Libraries NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact will be greater since 86% of libraries funding goes to frontline services. - Likely that ‘reduction in scale and scope of library provision’ will be necessary undermining delivery as per statutory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will disproportionately restrict access to library or educational facilities for those from deprived areas, those seeking employment (using library facilities to make online job applications), those with

	<p>obligations and existing library policy and standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DfC anticipate reduced opening hours, potentially library closures and impact on services (there are moves to end rural library services already). - Negative impact on number of S75 categories. 	<p>disabilities, older people or migrant workers/ethnic minorities who rely on libraries to access news from home or linguistic support/information services. This will have a huge impact on children, especially from deprived households, who often use libraries to access computers, the internet, learning resources or even as a safe space for study.</p>
<p>Arm's Length Bodies: 5% cut to budget of National Museums NI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact likely on its onsite work with those with older people, those with mental health issues and physical disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will disproportionately restrict access to museums for those from deprived areas.
<p>Arm's Length Bodies: 5% cut to budget of Sport NI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will cut grants to third party organisations reducing participation in sport and physical activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will disproportionately restrict access to sports or fitness activities for those from deprived areas, with disabilities, older people or migrant workers/ethnic minorities. This will have a significant impact on public health – and adversely impact those with the worst health outcomes/expectations. It will also impact children, especially those from the most deprived backgrounds, who access sports and as a diversionary alternative to Anti-Social Behaviour.
<p>Arm's Length Bodies:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact is likely on their customer base which is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This cut will disproportionately hit those

5% cut to budget of Ulster Support Employment Ltd	those with disabilities or health conditions who they help into employment.	with disabilities or health conditions who are seeking to re-integrated into the labour market.
Arm's Length Bodies: 5% cut to budgets of Charities Commissioner NI, NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, Commissioner for Older People NI	- DfC anticipates that cuts may impact their statutory role on behalf of S75 groups.	- This cut will disproportionately restrict access to justice or representation by the children, older people and those relying on charitable support e.g. those from deprived areas, with disabilities, older people or migrant workers/ethnic minorities.
Third Party Organisations	- Funding support to other third party organisations may end – impacting any S75 groups they benefit.	- Likely to impact S75 groups benefiting from these third party organisations.
Rates Support Grant	- This is a statutory grant – however there is no minimum payment. Proposed to reduce this by a further £4m in 2023-24. This will impact the funding base of councils.	- Likely to impact council areas with lower rates bases (who currently benefit). This will have a clear urban-rural differential impact.
Supporting People Programme	- Housing shortfall for older people is 9% (920 units); women at risk of domestic violence 49% (650 units); those with learning disability or mental health issues 15-21% (540 units);	- Impact likely on the 19,000 people annually supported by SPP to live independently. Beneficiaries include those experiencing homelessness, young,

	<p>homeless people with alcohol/drug issues 12-24% (540 units).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduction in funding will potentially impact all these already highly vulnerable groups.	<p>old and people with a disability, including mental health and learning difficulties.</p>
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3.15 The capital allocation for 2023-24 is down 3.9% or £8.7m to only £224.8m. Given that the bulk of this is funding was due to fund new build social housing and construction inflation which has been running at 26%, this amounts to a funding gap of at least £59 million for the year. Underfunding on this scale will cut across the plans to recommence meaningful social housing builds and only add to the growing homelessness and overcrowding problems.

3.16 Indeed, the Department recognises that the capital funding shortfall is such that the allocation ‘will allow DfC to meet its statutory and contractual obligations’ with only a ‘small portion of the budget left to allocate funding to priority investment projects’.

3.17 The table below provides an analysis of the likely equality impact of the Capital funding shortfall.

Summary of Equality Concerns: Resource DEL underfunding		
Policy	Equality Impact	Equality Groups affected
Social Housing shortfall	- New build target for 2023-24 is 2,000 – DfC estimate that the budget will only build 1,400 units or 600 short.	- Will differentially impact those with dependents, younger people given waiting lists for social housing are already at record levels.
Cuts to Affordable Warmth Scheme	- DfC may ‘consider closing scheme to new applicants’	- Likely to disproportionately impact older persons, those with disabilities at greatest risk of fuel poverty.
Private sector grants and major adaptations	- Cut may necessitate ‘immediate reduction in number	- Grants relate to ‘statutory disabled facility and repairs’

	of grant approvals’ - Potential impact on DfC’s statutory responsibilities.	- will therefore impact disproportionately those with disabilities and potentially older people.
Urban Regeneration Programme	- Potential halt to investment under this programme	- Will impact on accessibility with a disproportionate impact on those with disabilities, also younger people who may find employment through hospitality sector growth following investment.
Capital projects in Culture, Arts, Heritage, Sports and Green Growth	- Either significantly curtailed or stopped completely	- Likely significant adverse impact on those from disadvantaged and S75 categories.

Underfunding of the Department for Infrastructure

4.1 The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has a wide range of responsibilities including the maintenance, development and planning of critical infrastructure in Northern Ireland. It has a focus on water, transport and planning with the aim of improving people’s quality of life, reducing impact on the planet and building prosperity. The Department funds Northern Ireland Water, the statutory water and sewerage undertaker; sponsors Waterways Ireland, a cross-border implementation body with responsibility for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways; sponsors the NI Transport Holding Company, which is the parent company of Translink, the region’s bus and rail company. The Department has responsibility for management of flood risk, the Road Network, the implementation of the Regional Transport Strategy, delivery of the Strangford Ferry and management of

the Rathlin Ferry; community transport services and the active travel infrastructure. Given such a focus, cuts to funding for this department will have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable and on efforts to deliver a 'just transition'.

- 4.2** The Department for Infrastructure acknowledge that the baseline budget for water, transport and planning has been 'historically' insufficient to meet a basic level of service with a consequential over-reliance on in-year funding through monitoring rounds. The impact that this has had over the years is that there has been a failure to deliver bridge, roads and rivers inspections, adoption of housing developments, remedial works and safety improvements. It has also impacted investment to enable modal shift from private cars. Underfunding since 2014, has meant that the Department has operated a 'limited service' in terms of repairing road defects.
- 4.3** The inadequate budgets for DfI mean that Northern Ireland is one of the only regions in Europe where public transport is not directly subvented. With the removal of the fuel rebate, Translink has survived from the school transport contract, concessionary fares contracts and limited PSO support. As noted in the consultation documentation, underfunding for public transport has left Translink struggling and that the service was maintained last year through the company 'drawing down on its reserves but there is now no capacity for this to continue into 2023-24'. The company informed Unite, GMB and SIPTU three frontline representative trade unions that it was unable to provide any pay increase due to the budget – and the result has been a sharply escalating industrial dispute which has resulted in widespread disruption on strike days with all bus and rail services inoperative.
- 4.4** DfI identified it required a resource budget of £690.9 million for the current year. This included £218.5m for NI Water, £150.9m for Translink, £5.8m for DVA, £4.5m for Waterways Ireland, £234m for Transport and Road Asset Management, £30.6m for Climate, Planning & Public transport, and £46.6m for Water and Departmental delivery.

- 4.5 The funding package imposed unilaterally by the Secretary of State was inadequate to meet these additional pressures. He provided only £523.4m to the Department – a shortfall of 24% on the resource budget required.
- 4.6 The financial situation is so challenging that the Department has already moved to reduce expenditure and raise revenue. It has increased Translink and Rathlin Ferry fares, increased on-street car parking charges, increased non-domestic water and sewerage charges, continued the 'limited' road maintenance service and reduced other expenditure e.g. road safety programmes, staff vacancy controls. The net shortfall after these cuts is £112m. As part of a joint transport union delegation meeting the Permanent Secretary for DfI we were informed that without any additional commitments the department was facing an unavoidable overspend of £70 million in the year – just to meet its statutory obligations and pre-existing commitments.
- 4.7 The measures adopted due to the inadequate budget are likely to have a significantly adverse and regressive impact on disadvantaged groups, in particular those from Section 75 categories. This reflects the fact that rural-dwellers, lower-income households, older people, children and the disabled rely to a greater extent on public transport than the wider public. Reductions to road safety initiatives will have a particularly detrimental impact – especially to younger people and rural dwellers.
- 4.8 In order to deliver the further £112 million in cuts, the Department considered a range of further service reductions and cost-saving measures. These include ceasing road safety advertising, the active school travel programme, maintenance at Crumlin Road gaol and cuts to funding for Arms-length bodies. The department highlight the potential for:
- A reduction in the public transport system
 - Impacts for water and waste water services
 - Reductions to road maintenance and flood risk to emergency-only status;
 - End funding for community transport;
 - Switching off street lights; and,
 - No winter service i.e. road gritting.

Clearly these would result in very considerable impacts to the public, and in particular those falling into Section 75 categories.

- 4.9 Unite has ongoing industrial disputes for a pay increase in Translink, Roads Service, Rivers Agency, Forest Service, Historical Buildings division – all of which are primarily related to the inadequacy of DfI's budget.

Equality Impact Response

- 5.1 The budget allocated to DfI is completely inadequate to cover the costs of its various responsibilities. The Department has completed or will complete equality impact screening on the following proposals:

- Reduction/Cessation of wastewater treatment;
- Reduction of essential road maintenance to emergency response only;
- Switching off street lights;
- Reduction to concessionary fares scheme;
- Ending funding for community transport, urban and shop mobility services.

The DfI itself has raised concerns about the legality of what is being countenanced. Many of the options being considered to deliver the budget 'are not within the power of the Permanent Secretary to take under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation Etc.) Act 2022.

- 5.2 The table overleaf contains an initial assessment of the potential for all the proposed service cuts and cost saving measures to impact Section 75 groups.
- 5.3 Not included in this table are the actions already taken by DfI in previous budgetary periods and which have had a long-term deleterious impact on public services and infrastructure. The inadequacy of resource funding provided to DfI has meant that Northern Ireland lags significantly behind other regions regarding physical infrastructure and public transport. The budget cuts only make things worse and mean that historic shortfalls are set to become further exacerbated.

Summary of Equality Concerns: Resource DEL underfunding

Policy	Equality Impact	Equality Groups adversely affected
Increase Translink fares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct financial impact on those using public transport; - Reduced uptake of public transport, increased isolation and reliance on private car (environmental impacts). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher impact on those of working age who pay full fares. - Low pay workers, shift workers who rely on public transport will suffer disproportionately.
Increase Rathlin Ferry fares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct financial impact on those using the ferry service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focused adverse impact on those living on Rathlin Island who suffer both a financial cost and further isolation. - Likely to impact Rathlin economy.
Increase on-street car parking charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on town centres and those using car parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to have a disproportionate impact on rural dwellers, small businesses, low pay and shift workers.
Increase non-domestic water and sewerage charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on small businesses and farmers who pay non-domestic charges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to impact rural economy.
Continue 'limited' road maintenance service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased likelihood of damage to road vehicles, costs associated with repair, risk of accidents and injuries/death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely disproportionate impact on rural communities and economies; - Potential to impact those of working age

Reduce road safety programmes; cease road safety advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased risk of accidents and injuries/death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to disproportionately affect younger drivers who are already more likely to be involved in accidents. - Impact on school children who participate on these schemes.
Cease the active school travel programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will reverse progress made in ensuring modal shift of younger cohort to active travel alternatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to impact negatively – both physical and mental health – children and young adults. - Environmental impact
Cease maintenance at Crumlin Road Gaol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to undermine growth in volumes of visitors to this amenity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential impact to north Belfast economic and social infrastructure.
Reduce public transport services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This proposal remains undefined but has potential to massively impact communities who lose vital services, as well as Unite the union members providing those services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant impact on residents in deprived urban and isolated rural communities; - Disproportionate impact on older people, younger people and children, shift workers and those with disabilities who rely upon such services.
Reduce concessionary fares scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risks include more likelihood of older persons to be isolated from social, economic and cultural activities; - Higher cost for older persons already experiencing above average levels of poverty; - Likely to reduce mobility and reduce income for Translink undermining sustainability of public transport routes and services (in particular in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disproportionate impact e.g. on mental health of older persons, disabled, rural dwellers, those coming from deprived urban areas – who are more dependent on public transport.

	rural areas).	
Reduce/ Cease wastewater treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As specified in the DfI EQIA Screening Analysis on this proposal, it is likely to involve 'discharge of screened raw sewage at coastal wastewater treatment works'. - Proportion of population served by complaint WwTW would fall from 99.23% to 25%. - 'Pollution would certainly increase in rivers and coastal waters and sensitive rivers'. - This would 'breach consents resulting in prosecutions against NI Water and the imposition of fines' - Incidents of 'out of sewer flooding would increase' - Pumping of wastewater to WwTW would cease 'resulting in blockages...and the likelihood of out of sewer flooding into homes and businesses and on public streets'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This proposal would massively impact all Section 75 categories, in particular older persons and those with disabilities. - It would also undermine efforts to improve the already abject condition of the region's water bodies and water ways (consider contribution of wastewater to the Lough Neagh pollution event this Summer).
Reduce road maintenance and flood risk to emergency-only status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety risk to road users through higher incidence of RTAs; - Risk to communities at risk of flooding; - Likelihood of higher costs for vehicle repair and maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disproportionate impact on rural dwellers and those from deprived urban areas at risk of flooding, those with disabilities and older persons.
End funding for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely to result in rural dwellers and those with general access issues being denied ability to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very likely to have disproportionate impact on those with disabilities, older persons,

community transport, urban transport and shop mobility.	travel for shopping, medical appointments, social outlets	children, rural dwellers.
Switch off street lights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety implications for road traffic accidents but also risk of increased ASB/harassment; - Impact for access for pedestrians – particularly those with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disproportionately will impact older persons, children, those with disabilities, women, LGBT, rural dwellers and those from deprived urban communities.
No winter service i.e. road gritting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety risk to road users through higher incidence of RTAs; - Higher costs for vehicle repair and maintenance; - Rural isolation and economic dislocation; - Impact on Unite members' incomes in Roads Service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disproportionate impact on rural dwellers and shift workers; - Children and parents (especially mothers), workers going to work who use roads and footpaths; - Resulting economic and social dislocation will affect all Section 75 groups disproportionately.

6.0 Underfunding of the Executive Office

- 6.1** The Executive Office and its Arms-length Bodies have a wide range of responsibilities with core priorities being 'tackling disadvantage and promoting equality of opportunity'. These include its responsibility for the Good Relations strategy 'Together: Building a United Community'; its coordinating activities for equality and human rights and sponsorship of the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland; its support for minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers; its trauma-informed policy development and support for 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls', victims of the troubles and survivors of historical institutional abuse. Given such a focus, cuts to the funding of TEO will have a significantly disproportionate adverse impact on the most vulnerable and their rights.
- 6.2** The Executive Office admits that the new budget is 'unprecedented' and amounts to a £9.5m resource underfunding (or 11.1%). This situation results from the resource budget falling from £78.8m to £75.8m at a time when TEO's expenditure requirements have risen to £85.2m.
- 6.3** While the resource underfunding does not impact directly earmarked funds for Executive priorities (i.e. HIA/Victim's Payments/Truth Recovery, Communities in Transition, Dedicated Mechanism, NI Protocol or EU Peace Match Funding), sustaining these programmes will put additional pressure on TEO.
- 6.4** The funding package imposed unilaterally by the Secretary of State was inadequate to meet the additional pressures arising from the Executive priorities. TEO recognises that cuts to 'front-facing' activity will be unavoidable and that 'the implications of this year's budget will be felt keenly in our community'.
- 6.5** The level of underfunding is so great that TEO itself has warned that some 'decisions are of a kind normally reserved for a Minister'. The guidance is

clear in indicating that ‘a major change of an existing policy, programme or scheme should normally be left for Ministers to decide’.

Equality Impact Response

- 6.6** The budget allocated to TEO is inadequate to meet arising need. Non-ring fenced resource funding represents a 3.9% reduction which when compounded with rising expenditure requirements amounts to a total underfunding for non-ring fenced expenditure of 11.1%.
- 6.7** At the same time, ring-fenced expenditure – for Victim’s payments, HIA redress, Mother & Baby homes, Communities in Transition, Homes for Ukraine and the Peace+ programme – have been protected.
- 6.8** Non-ring fenced resource funding for TEO currently supports Arms-Length Bodies (37%), staff costs (33%), programme, grant and administrative expenditure (17%) and the Shared Future programme (13%). TEO estimate that staffing costs could be reduced by £2.9m in year through the extension of policies not to backfill vacancies but this is still inadequate to meet the scale of reductions required. In the absence of a Voluntary Exit Scheme to facilitate an accelerated reduction in staffing costs, TEO proposes to deliver the budget through applying the balance of cuts to the ‘externally delivered programmes’.
- 6.9** The Department itself has conducted an assessment of the impact arising from a proposed 10% reduction to budget allocations to the Arms-Length Bodies. This would impact the office of the Commissioner for Survivors and Institutional Childhood Abuse, the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Community Relations Council, Equality Commission for NI, Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board, Maze/Long Kesh Development Commission, North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat, Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, Office of the Attorney General for NI, Strategic Investment Board, Victims and Survivors Service and Victims’ Payments Board.
- 6.10** The table overleaf provides a summary of Unite the union’s concerns in relation to the policies under consideration by the Executive Office.

Summary of Equality Concerns: Resource TEO underfunding

Policy	Equality Impact	Equality Groups adversely affected
10% reduction to budget for Equality Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely impact across all aspects of ECNI work in particular provision of support for individuals coming from the full range of S75 groups. - Significant concerns for impact on ECNI discrimination advice and support, its work on improving race equality law, hate crime protections, gender pay reporting mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likely adverse impact on those with disabilities (particularly learning disabilities), minority ethnic groups, older people, children, LGBT, women and those with caring responsibilities. Impact on particular multiple deprived or at risk groups e.g. children in receipt of FSMs; single mothers; women challenging harassment or discrimination due to maternity/pregnancy.
10% reduction to budget for Community Relations Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact across all aspects of CRC work including grants to number, depth and scale of front-line work. - 50% reduction to local 'Together: Building a United Community' programmes delivered in conjunction with local councils. - Impact on Community Relations/Cultural Diversity small grant scheme; North Belfast Strategic GR Programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant impact to work to improve community relations – potential threat identified to 'infrastructure on which future work can be built when the financial situation improves'. - Potential threat to 81 jobs and 120 projects delivered by GR projects.
10% reduction to budget of Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact to commission's work which benefits individuals taken across all S75 groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential for adverse impacts on women, those with disabilities and across groups with different political beliefs.

for Victims and Survivors		
10% reduction to budget of Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.	- Potential impact on S75 groups as it might undermine appointment based exclusively on merit.	- Potential impact across all Section 75 groups.
10% reduction to budget of Attorney General for NI	- Contractual obligations means a reduction to staffing levels and this will 'impact on AG's ability to deliver on her protective function under the Mental Capacity Act'.	- Significant adverse impact on those with disabilities and older persons in particular.
10% reduction to budget for NI Judicial Appointments Commission	- This would necessitate a reduction in the number of judicial recruitment schemes from 8 to 5. - This will 'add to the post-Covid backlog of cases to be heard' impinging 'access to justice' including those with a disability and with mental health issues.	- Potential to impact across all S75 groups in particular on those with disabilities.
10% reduction to the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse	- Budget reduction of this scale will impact staffing and 'detrimentally effect services provided to victims and survivors'.	- Those affected by Institutional Childhood abuse are predominantly male, older and having disabilities. These groups are likely to be impacted disproportionately by this cuts.

- 6.11 The proposals under consideration by the Executive Office for cutting funding for the TEO supported Arms-Length Bodies are all likely to have a substantially disproportionate impact on individuals coming from Section 75 groups.
- 6.12 The Executive Office recognises that its recommendations above are not those ‘that would be made by officials under normal circumstances’. The impact of reducing the budget for Good Relations programmes conducted in conjunction with local authorities by half are particularly concerning given the importance of improving community relations at this time.

Other Departments and industrial disputes

- 7.1 Similar analyses could be conducted on expenditure by all other Stormont Departments – most obviously Health and Education. While funding for Health has been ring-fenced in nominal terms, there is no adequate provision for increasing demand or inflationary pressures – translating into a substantial shortfall. Education is proportionately even harder hit – meaning a chronic funding crisis across schools and wider education services.
- 7.2 In both Health and Education, Unite the union members working as health or education workers are currently in dispute. All health trade unions are currently in industrial dispute, having taken repeated strike actions, to secure the extension of the pay improvement paid to NHS workers in England and Wales. Such is the inadequacy of the budget allocated that the Barnett consequential for this award has been allocated elsewhere meaning that workers now face the reopening of pay disparity with England and Wales. It should be noted that NHS workers in Northern Ireland took strike action at the end of 2019 – which was a material factor in the re-establishment of the Executive in early 2020. Pay disparity will redouble the challenges facing the NHS in Northern Ireland in terms of staffing recruitment and retention – and exacerbate the staffing crisis which is resulting in the collapse of services.
- 7.3 Northern Ireland’s education sector too has a live dispute involving both teaching unions and support staff unions. Unite’s members – predominantly working as school bus drivers are currently pursuing an industrial dispute demanding the implementation of a Pay & Grading review which was negotiated as a mechanism to address the pay and

staffing crisis in that sector at the end of last year's pay dispute. This Pay & Grading review was a recommendation of the 2018 NJC pay deal but has yet to be delivered.

Revenue-Raising Measures

- 8.1 As well as imposing inadequate budgets on the Departments, the Secretary of State has called for the Departments to investigate areas where increased revenue might be raised. For the most part, these focus on arrangements which are relatively more beneficial for people in Northern Ireland compared to for example England. In some cases, these have also been considered as possible options by the Departments e.g. removal of free bus and rail travel for over 60s, and have been discussed previously – but there are a number of new proposals.
- 8.2 The Secretary of State's proposals include introduction of water charges for domestic house-holders (currently paid under domestic rates); prescription charges; airline duties; ; removal of caps to tuition fees, rates' reliefs and the partial de-rating of industrial buildings. These are being posed as options to bridge a funding gap rooted in a funding formula which doesn't adequately take account of higher objective need or legacy impacts. They are for the most part highly regressive measures and are likely to have a profound impact on the wider economy. It is not clear whether they would raise what is anticipated e.g. the main 'income' associated with introducing prescription charges results from lower uptake of medicines which are known to result in worse health outcomes and thereby increased costs on already hard-pressed NHS services.

Conclusion

- 9.1 The budgets set by the Secretary of State represent an attack on vital public services and indeed by extension an attack on the entire population of Northern Ireland. Due to their dependence on public service provision, its impact will be greatest on the most vulnerable and the most highly deprived.
- 9.2 These budgets impact workers – whether those directly affected by the cuts i.e. those employed by the departments or arms-length bodies, those who depend or benefit from public services as well as those who derive income and employment as a result of the additional economic demand arising from that expenditure in the economy.

- 9.3 The Trade Union movement reject the Secretary of State's apparent notion that imposing budget cuts can engineer an industrial relations crisis which will be useful in putting pressure on parties to go back into government. This strategy does not take cognisance of the reality of Northern Ireland society or politics and will only make the situation worse.
- 9.4 Public services need to be adequately funded and unfortunately this is not the case in Northern Ireland and has not been the case for many years now. While budgets set for public services by Westminster have been consistently inadequate – the Barnett formula does not make provision for the higher objective need existing in Northern Ireland – a region which continues to lag the rest of the UK on a range of economic and social indices – reflecting its geography as well as the continued legacy of conflict, division and underinvestment.
- 9.5 In addition to the problem of chronic and long-term underfunding of public services, there is the additional problem of huge levels of private sector waste through outsourcing. This is a major problem across all departments. There is already substantial research on the poor value-for-money offered by PFI/PPPs but the use of them in the past means that tightened budgets fall even more sharply on in-house provided services – often affecting the most vulnerable disproportionately – as well as workers.
- 9.6 For our part, Unite the union stands ready to defend public services and our members. Northern Ireland's public services are not optional add-ons or valid targets for cuts in an attempt to corral parties back into a working Executive. They are vital for our community and have been hard-won and defended by working-class people and the labour movement over generations. Workers across the public sector are currently in dispute – to win pay increases, end the staffing crisis and defend our public services. If the Secretary of State does not soon reverse his approach, it is likely that industrial action by workers in all public sector unions in Northern Ireland will escalate further.

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