

Regulatory Impact Assessment

The Discretionary Support Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Purpose and Intended Effect

1. As part of the proposed welfare reform changes, the discretionary element of financial support previously delivered through Social Fund in the form of community care grants and crisis loans will be abolished. The NI Executive's response to the abolition of Social Fund is the Discretionary Support Scheme. The Discretionary Support Regulations will give effect to the Discretionary Support Scheme.
2. Discretionary Support is designed to alleviate the most exceptional, extreme or crisis situations which present a significant risk to the health, safety or well-being of low income and vulnerable households through the provision of practical support and financial assistance. It is designed in a way that complements and strengthens the Executive's efforts to tackle poverty and protect those who are most disadvantaged in our society.

Options

3. By doing nothing and having no Discretionary Support in place following the abolition of the discretionary element of financial support previously delivered through Social Fund, we would fail to meet the Executive's priorities to address poverty and disadvantage.

Business Sectors Affected

4. N/A

Benefits and Compliance Cost

5. Benefits will be monetary in terms of providing financial assistance and practical support to those on a low income. There will be no compliance costs as there is no impact on business. The sustainability of the scheme will be reliant on the repayment of loans to customers.

Consultation/Other Impact Assessments

6. The Discretionary Support Policy was developed and consulted on in 2012 with the Discretionary Support design consulted on in 2013. Responses to both consultations were generally very supportive of the need to have a discretionary support mechanism in place and which would focus on those in exceptional or crisis circumstances and where there is a risk to health and safety.
7. The Discretionary Support Scheme design was equality screened in January 2013 and no adverse impacts were identified.

8. The Discretionary Support Regulations were equality screened in June 2016 and whilst some minor impacts were highlighted, there are mitigations in place to ameliorate any negative impact.

Summary and Recommendation

9. Discretionary Support will be positive as it will meet the Executive’s priority to address poverty and disadvantage. There will be no impact on business.
10. Once operational, the scheme will be monitored and evaluated to ensure it is meeting its objective to provide assistance to those on a low income.

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