Equalities issues

171. In July 2011, the Convener of the Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) wrote to the RACCE Committee to ask it to submit a short report to the EOC, setting out what steps it took to include equalities considerations in its draft budget scrutiny and what its findings were.

172. Much of the funding provision within the RACCE Committee’s remit is directly targeting rural communities where constituent households and businesses are differentiated by income, age structure (of those entering and leaving rural industries) and proximity to services in rural areas. It is impossible to determine a net effect of these changes on all equal opportunity characteristics but some key interventions are noteworthy: specifically the Next Generation Digital Fund and Rural Cohesion spending are favourable in terms of inclusion.

173. Funding provision within the Minister for Environment and Climate Change’s portfolio crosses over a wide range of spending lines and other Ministers’ portfolios and it would be impossible to determine a comprehensive effect on all equal opportunity dimensions. The main areas where spend would have a direct impact would be for those on low income in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency schemes. In addition, it has been documented that the elimination of fuel poverty could prevent cases of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Funding schemes such as the Energy Assistance Package and Home Insulation Scheme will therefore have a direct impact on equal opportunities.

174. There are clearly equity impacts in relation to the distributional impacts of policy by income groups. However, any quantitative comment would require some formal modelling to be completed. In the absence of formal empirical modelling, any conclusions would be qualitative speculation.