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Our work in progressing the equality budgeting initiative flows from the commitment in the programme for Government to develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.

There is also a commitment to ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing.

These commitments are also reflected in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020.

Since last year we have been working to implement these commitments in a real and meaningful way. And in doing so we've engaged with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the National Women's Council who have been very helpful in guiding us in our approach.

Slide 2

Before I look in more detail at the pilot approach we've adopted for this budgetary cycle I just wanted to highlight a few principles that have underpinned our approach.

We see equality budgeting as a tool that can provide us with greater information on the likely equality impacts of proposed and/or ongoing budgetary measures.

Greater visibility of such impacts enables better integration of equality concerns into the budgetary process,

This also enables the impacts of budgetary decisions to be subject to greater scrutiny.

In this way, we view equality budgeting as an important element of any well functioning budgetary system.

We don't view it as creating a separate and distinct budget or process for specific equality measures.

Rather, it is about the equality impact of budget policy

From looking at the international experience countries that do well in this area integrate equality budgeting into their existing budgetary framework.

That is something that we have tried to replicate in our approach by anchoring the equality budgeting initiative in the existing performance budgeting framework.

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So to look in further detail at the progress we have made so far.

On budget day a policy paper "Equality Budgeting: Proposed Next Steps in Ireland" was published

I understand that paper was shared with the Committee members in advance of this meeting.

This paper looks at the international experience of equality budgeting, and the existing mechanisms in place to assess equality impacts in Ireland the paper and also outlines the pilot approach for equality budgeting that is in operation for this years budgetary cycle.

Given the potential scale of equality budgeting, it has been decided to focus, at least initially on the equality ground of gender.

From a practical perspective we felt that this would be most effective, as there is a wealth of international experience of gender budgeting, and it is also an equality dimension for which a lot of disaggregated data already exists.

Our intention is to learn from this approach, and expand the initiative to other policy areas and equality dimensions in the future.

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In advance of the publication of the Revised Estimates we asked the six Departments participating in the pilot programme to conduct an assessment of their selected programme for its impact on gender equality.

Following that assessment they articulated a high level equality objective for the programme.

Relevant performance indicators and targets were also set by the Department to enable us to track progress towards achieving the overall goal.

Progress towards achieving these targets will be reported on in the Public Service Performance Report.

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This slide gives an idea of the diversity of the programme areas that are included in the pilot initiative, and the types of high level goals that have been articulated.

Six programme areas have been selected, that cover a wide range of government expenditure areas.

Each of these Departments have also published a number of performance indicators that will allow us to track progress towards achieving the equality goals.

Our intention is to learn from the experiences with these programme areas this year, with a view to expanding the initiative in future years.

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Work is currently underway to prepare for the publication of the Public Service Performance Report.

Following on from the equality Goals and Indicators published in the REV, the report will contain an update on the progress and steps that are being taken by Departments to work towards realising their objectives.

In order to guide our approach to the further development of the equality budgeting initiative, we would intend to establish an Expert Advisory Group on Equality Budgeting. The function of the group will be to take stock of progress to date and provide advice and guidance on the future roll-out and expansion of the equality budgeting initiative.

Alongside this, we will also continue our work in supporting Departments participating in the initiative, and developing the skills necessary to equality proof policies.