

Offering the best value and the best service to all makes best business sense.

View from the Chair Tuesday 14 April 2015. Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

You may recall that earlier this year I expressed my concern that the Northern Ireland Executive was not going to proceed with legislation to protect people from discrimination on grounds of age when accessing goods, facilities and services, during this Assembly mandate.

Fortunately, the position altered a few weeks ago with an announcement from OFMDFM that age discrimination legalisation will be extended to offer protections to people aged 16 and over. Although we were disappointed that all ages are not going to be protected, we have welcomed this announcement of a public consultation as a step in the right direction, while stressing that we would continue to press for an early commitment for protection for all ages to be included.

But what will this new legislation mean for businesses in Northern Ireland? Simply put, it will mean that no-one should be treated less favourably, without good reason, because they are part of a particular age group and as such we believe that it will be good for business – encouraging all businesses to reach as wide a demographic as possible.

This has been true for other groups such as disability, race, religion, gender and sexual orientation, so the same rules should apply when we consider people of different ages. We should deal with the person and not the perception of who they are. If people are dealt with on an individual basis based on their needs and capabilities, business should reap the benefits by customer loyalty.

So when the legislation comes into effect, individuals may well be able to challenge actions by businesses based solely on their age. For example, businesses will not be able to treat an older person in a humiliating or degrading manner simply because of their age. Business will have to consider how their services impact on people of different ages and ensure that they do not restrict services to certain age groups without good reason.

When these changes to the legislation come, business will be obliged to embrace them, but business owners are already aware of the considerable advantages of making their businesses as welcoming as possible to as many people as they can. The spending power of older people is well known as an

important part of our economy but so too is that of many other age groups. . The new legislation should not be seen as an imposition on businesses but rather as a reminder that offering the best value and the best service to all makes the best business sense.

ENDS