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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Equality Commission Publishes Nineteenth Annual Report 2017-18**

The nineteenth Annual Report of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, covering the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, was laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and the House of Commons on 5 September 2018.

The Commission has also published a review summarising the report, which describes the range and impact of the Commission's work twenty years after the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement made the focus on equality one of its central tenets.

"Initially there was reason to take pride in the fact that, in some important aspects, Northern Ireland's equality law framework was at that time ahead of the rest of the UK, Ireland and Europe," Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said. "Clear and effective equality laws helped in the development of a more peaceful and inclusive society and, by providing all employers with a clear structure within which to operate, they were an asset to economic investment and growth.

"Twenty years on, where are we? Unfortunately, our legislative framework has fallen behind the rest of the UK. The lack of a functioning Executive means there has been no progress on any of the policy recommendations we have made to strengthen the equality laws or to implement equality strategies. Proposals to harmonise our equality laws into a single piece of equality legislation, and/or to revise and update those laws, have come to nothing."

"In addition, although our responsibilities have increased under anti-discrimination legislation on grounds of age, disability and sexual orientation, we have faced significant reductions in our budget. The Commission's operating budget was £2 million less in 2017/18 than it was ten years ago and this has had a significant impact on our staffing levels - our staff numbers are almost a third less than five years ago. This is in a context of increasing demand for our services promoting equality, combating discrimination and addressing key inequalities in our society."

"Brexit also raises concerns that decades of progress on equality issues here, in some cases founded on European Directives and decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union, could be undermined or even reversed. It is important that the legal arrangements to be made reflect the particular context of Northern Ireland, including the commitments to equality which are enshrined in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. There should be specific provisions in any Withdrawal Agreement to ensure there is no regression from existing equality rights."

“For our society to flourish and succeed Northern Ireland has to be seen as a welcoming place - a society which accommodates difference and diversity, where all our people feel secure and know they have equal access to education, a house and a job. The Equality Commission will continue to promote equality and to tackle the enduring inequalities being experienced by people across our society.”

## Downloads

- The Equality Commission’s [Annual Review 2017-18](#) *(pdf)*
- The Equality Commission’s [Annual Report 2017-18](#) *(pdf)*