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PRESS RELEASE

Equality Chief Commissioner considers new challenges as 2019-20 Annual Report is published

In her foreword to the Equality Commission's latest Annual Report, Chief Commissioner Geraldine McGahey OBE focuses not just on the achievements of the past year, but also new challenges facing Northern Ireland this year and years to come.

Ms McGahey says: "Undoubtedly we will be living with the impact of COVID-19 for many years. Our vision for equality for all has never been as important as it is now.

"We can already see that there are differential impacts of COVID-19 on different groups, in particular disabled people, older people, some children and some black and ethnic minority people.

"We must build on the learnings from the last four months. Equality issues must be considered in all policy responses as we continue to live with COVID-19, and the equality duties which are binding upon public authorities must be at the heart of decision-making, even in this difficult time.

"There have been, and will continue to be, many changes to the way we all live and work. We must ensure that Northern Ireland's workplaces continue to maintain and improve fair employment practices and equality of opportunity.

"We need to completely understand the impact of this pandemic. We need more comprehensive data across equality grounds to be collected, analysed and used to inform decision making in relation to COVID-19 as our Executive and policymakers design, deliver and/or review our laws, policies or service provision.

"In the year ahead, a priority for me is closing the gap between equality legislation and protections afforded in the rest of the United Kingdom and those in Northern Ireland. In particular, it is now time to revisit the introduction of protection against age discrimination when accessing goods, facilities and services, including health and social care. The Executive must progress this.

"We must see political commitment to progressing the various equality priorities included in 'New Decade New Approach' and I will look forward to working alongside

the Executive, Assembly and Assembly Committees to ensure these are progressed.

“Everything the Commission does aims to challenge discrimination and to champion equality. I am determined to do this independently and robustly. It has always been a challenging remit, and in this time of rapid and fundamental change, more necessary and more challenging than perhaps ever before.”

- [The annual report for 2019/20 is now available online](#) (pdf)