

16 December 2020

Human rights and equality bodies provide Brexit evidence to NI Assembly

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will join the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to give oral evidence to the Committee for the Executive Office on Wednesday.

The session, which will focus on issues around Brexit, will see the three Commissions present evidence on Article 2 of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) Chief Commissioner, Les Allamby, stated:

“The engagement today with the Assembly Committee is timely as negotiations continue between the EU and UK government to determine our future relationship. With or without a deal, the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission will have new powers to monitor, advise, enforce and report on the impacts of Brexit on human rights and equality in Northern Ireland. We will also work closely with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to address issues affecting the whole island.”

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Chief Commissioner, Sinéad Gibney, stated:

“It has been a tumultuous time since our last meeting with Assembly Members in October, but a vitally important one in the framing of the post Brexit relationship, and the associated protection of human rights and equality. There are significant issues which on an all-island basis we need to be mindful of as the relationship evolves between the UK and the EU.

“When the dust settles on 2020, we need to be in a position to ensure and reassure people that they can be aware of, secure information on and if necessary be able to vindicate their rights and protect themselves against discrimination.”

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) Chief Commissioner, Geraldine McGahey OBE, stated:

“We welcomed the opportunity today to brief Committee members on our preparations for overseeing the Government’s commitment that there will be no

reduction in certain equality and human rights as we leave the European Union. We recognise the very real concerns about our equality and rights protections in the new post Brexit environment and we have a critical role in ensuring that Government is held to this commitment. I assured the Committee that we will do this with vigour and purpose.”

Notes to editors

1. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) will provide evidence to The Committee of the Executive Office on 16 December at 2pm.

2. Brexit Roles of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC):

- **The UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement includes the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.** The Protocol reflects the commitment made by the UK Government to uphold the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In particular, the UK Government committed that the withdrawal will not lead to any diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland, as set out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, including in the area of protection against discrimination (Article 2(1)).

- In the context of the Article 2 commitment, The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) will work together to provide oversight of, and reporting on, rights and equalities issues falling within the scope of the commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension.

- **Schedule 3 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020** confers new functions on both the NI Commissions (ECNI and NIHRC), to enable each to act as part of the ‘dedicated mechanism’ (DM), to monitor, advise, report on and enforce the UK’s adherence to its commitment that there will be no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland as a result of the UK’s exit from the EU. This is due to come into force at the end of the transition period, 31 December 2020.