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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Data is a vital component in tackling the impacts of COVID 19 pandemic**

As we live with the COVID-19 pandemic and its future impacts, access to up to date and detailed equality data in Northern Ireland is a vital component in shaping the public policy response going forward.

Based on data available in Britain and elsewhere, there are different equality impacts of the virus on a range of grounds. Indeed, this pandemic would appear to be reinforcing existing health and wider inequalities and there is real concern that existing inequalities will be exacerbated, or new inequalities may emerge.

“Equality considerations must be at the heart of public policy decision making as we work to protect people in our society most at risk from the virus and its effects. We need 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,” said Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Currently whilst the Department of Health COVID 19 dashboard data includes information of impacts by age and gender, it does not include for example data on race or disability. This contrasts with the position in Britain where data is collected on race. This has helped focus the Government’s attention there on the differential impact the virus would appear to be having on black, Asian or minority ethnic people.

The Commission has consistently asked public authorities to collect wider and more detailed equality information to help them effectively implement the equality duties under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These duties oblige public authorities to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across nine equality groups.

“We would query how our Executive and public policy makers can respond to the pandemic’s different impacts without more detailed equality data. At this time, more than any other, it’s vital that we understand as much as can about how COVID-19 impacts on people most at risk,” Geraldine McGahey concluded.