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PRESS RELEASE

Opening outdoor spaces for business requires planning and creativity

With Northern Ireland's restaurants, coffee shops and cafés due to reopen next week, the Equality Commission is calling on businesses in the hospitality sector and the relevant public authorities to consider creatively how people with a disability can access the proposed use of new outdoor spaces.

Frank Fleming, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said: "As we emerge from lockdown, many of us are really looking forward to going out for a meal or coffee with family and friends. Innovative measures are currently being put in place for our safety and comfort, and to ensure local businesses remain viable. The use of new space is imaginative, but these changes must not impinge or negatively impact on access to either the street or the business for those with a disability, older people or families with young children. It is important that we support our local economy to rebuild and that we do this by finding solutions that work for everyone."

"We would encourage businesses to use our online ['Every Customer Counts'](#) resources. This will help them consider the access needs of their disabled customers when introducing these new outdoor spaces and ensure they comply with the Disability Discrimination Act."

"We are also providing advice and guidance to public authorities in relation to these matters. Public authorities including Councils must be aware of their continuing duty to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and consider any equality implications in terms of access when developing and implementing their policies.

"This is a challenging time for us all, as we strive to rebuild our economy and explore new ways of delivering services. But we can make this much easier for everyone if we work together positively. By showing consideration for everyone's needs, and ensuring we comply with the law, we can ease the potential consequences of new uses of space becoming a barrier for some." concluded Mr Fleming.

Notes to Editor

- Every Customer Counts online resources for [Retailers \(zip file\)](#)
- Every Customer Counts online resources for [Cafés, Restaurants and Hospitality Sector \(zip file\)](#)
- In Northern Ireland, businesses have obligations under the law (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) as amended to make reasonable adjustments for those with a disability to enable them access their goods, facilities and services. Councils as public authorities must consider changes to their policy decisions, such as to allow outdoor space to be used by commercial businesses, these changes to policies should be made within their equality scheme arrangements under their Section 75 duties.
- [Advice note for public authorities on the S75 duties when developing Covid-19 related policies](#)