

4 January 2021

Joint Press Statement from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **New Human Rights & Equality Oversight Roles Begin**

**The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland welcome new roles from 1 January 2021 to oversee the Government's commitment to protecting equality and human rights in a post Brexit Northern Ireland.**

Under the Ireland/NI Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement reached with the EU, the UK Government has committed to ensuring no reduction of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity provisions as committed to in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement as the UK withdraws from the EU. The Government has also committed to ensuring that, if certain EU equality laws are changed after 1 January 2021 to improve the protection of rights, then Northern Ireland will keep pace with those changes. Both Commissions have been charged with overseeing this commitment.

Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Les Allamby, and Geraldine McGahey OBE, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said:

“The Government's commitment to protect human rights and equality following Brexit is very important for everyone living here, and both Commissions have been given an enhanced role to monitor and report on this commitment.

“These are important new powers and we will not shy away from identifying issues of concern and if necessary taking robust legal action to ensure there is no back-sliding in the levels of protection currently in place in Northern Ireland.

“We will use our new powers to ensure Government upholds this commitment, including by assisting individuals, where appropriate, to take legal action if the Northern Ireland Executive or Assembly actions or legislation breaches this commitment. Where the duty to keep pace with future positive developments in EU law is relevant, we will also be vocal in advising the UK Government and NI Executive on the need to introduce progressive measures that advance human and rights and equality for all.”

Both Commissions will work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to provide oversight of rights and equalities issues falling within the scope of the commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension

If anyone has any queries or concerns around their human rights and equality protections after Brexit please contact us:

Human Rights Commission - Tel: 02890 243987

Equality Commission - Tel: 028 90 500 600

## Notes to editors

### 1. **Brexit: New roles of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI)**

- [New human rights and equality oversight roles begin](#) 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 relevant Chapter 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.