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PRESS RELEASE

Statement from Equality Commission Chief Commissioner on the Spend Local card scheme

Speaking about the Spend Local card scheme, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, Geraldine McGahey, said:

“It goes without saying that all government policy decisions should be taken with the statutory equality duties in mind. We raised our concerns about the equality impact assessment carried out for this policy in September. We were very disappointed that the screening was not completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development process and we queried the potential for the screening to actually inform the development or delivery of the High Street Scheme. The screening lacked data or information on which to determine impacts across the Section 75 equality grounds and consequently the assessments that there were no impacts for most of those grounds lacked coherence. A more robust and timely equality assessment would have enabled the Department to thoroughly consider and consult on the potential equality impacts.

“The operation of the Spend Local scheme seems to be causing problems for specific groups such as some married women and older people who may not have the forms of identification such as a driver’s licence or a valid passport required by the scheme. There is potential for discrimination against some of these groups who may experience less favourable treatment than others, in this case on grounds of their sex.

“We are writing to the Minister for the Economy today to remind him of the importance of adhering to the Section 75 duties and asking him to review the deadline set for applying for and using the card to ensure some groups of people are not adversely impacted and left out.

“Importantly this situation also highlights the lack of protection for older people who are currently not protected against discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, unlike their counterparts in the rest of the UK and Ireland.”