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Break down barriers, do not build new ones after Brexit

A long-term, sustainable solution is needed for disabled people travelling between Great Britain and Northern Ireland with their assistance dogs.

Equality Commissioner and Disability Rights Activist, June Best MBE said:
“We need to break down barriers for disabled people, not create new ones. Yet the new arrangements after Brexit are creating barriers and stress for those of us who depend on assistance dogs for our independence”.

“The additional requirements and checks being introduced for our assistance dogs are burdensome and unrealistic. We could even be separated from our dogs, if we can’t provide the new necessary documentation and evidence of vaccination and treatments when we travel to and from Great Britain”.

“While I am well aware of the many issues faced by wheelchair users when travelling, we simply wouldn’t dream of asking someone to leave their chair at the airport and pick it up on the way home. So why is this a possibility for those of us who rely on their assistance dogs? We need absolute certainty that this won’t happen to us and our dogs.”

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has advised that the grace period to implement the new arrangements for bringing pets and assistance dogs to, and from, Great Britain and Northern Ireland has been extended indefinitely, while negotiations between the UK Government and the European Union continue.

Geraldine McGahey, OBE, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said: “It is extremely important that the rights of disabled people are protected in post-Brexit Northern Ireland.”

“The issue of travel arrangements for assistance dogs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, if a sustainable solution for disabled people is not found, may have potential implications on equality and human rights, both domestically and internationally, including in relation to the Government’s commitment not to diminish certain rights post Brexit and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

“We urgently need a formal agreement between the UK Government and the European Union to ensure that there are no adverse impacts on assistance dog owners in Northern Ireland, in terms of pet passport requirements, due to Brexit”, concluded the Chief Commissioner.

Notes to Editor:

- Post-Brexit travel arrangements mean that pets and assistance dogs moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are required to adhere to the pet travel rules for third countries, including requirements for additional documentation and certain vaccinations or treatments.
- Under Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, the UK Government has committed to maintaining certain equality and human rights after Brexit. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission have been given additional roles and responsibilities to oversee the UK Government's compliance with this commitment and also to consider and assess the impact of Brexit on disabled people in Northern Ireland.