**Scottish equality and human rights bodies welcome inquiry into implications of Covid-19**

The bodies responsible for oversight of equality and human rights for adults, children and young people in Scotland, have today (Monday 27 April 2020) welcomed the decision by the Scottish Parliament’s Equalities and Human Rights Committee to undertake an inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on equality and human rights.

Earlier this month, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland (CYPCS) wrote jointly to Committee Convenor Ruth Maguire MSP, urging the need for an inquiry due to concerns that certain groups were being disproportionately and negatively affected by the impacts of the virus and responses to tackle it.

Concerns highlighted included for those groups being exposed to increased risk due to the likelihood of them being key workers, that certain groups were being most impacted by mitigation measures, and that those who would usually access support in their school or community were being cut off from that assistance due to lockdown measures.

The three organisations jointly called for an inquiry by the committee which would:

* identify individuals and groups who are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 and measures related to tackling it;
* identify actions that Scottish Government and other public bodies need to take to minimise the negative effect on equality and human rights, and;
* scrutinise measures taken by the Scottish Government and other public bodies for their impact on equality and human rights.

The three bodies have stated their belief that actions which are grounded in equality and human rights will command the strongest levels of public confidence, consent and compliance, and ensure that those who are most likely to experience the most negative impacts are prioritised and protected.

**John Wilkes, Head of Scotland at the Commission, said:**

““It is clear that this virus, and the protections put in place in response, impact people differently. We believe that it is important to carefully consider the effects on certain groups who are already disadvantaged so that they are not left further behind. We believe it is both possible and crucial to protect rights while saving lives and we look forward to contributing to the call for submissions issued by the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, and we stand ready to assist in their work.”

**Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People’s Commissioner, said:**

“Children in Scotland are being disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with those living in poverty now confined to inadequate housing and struggling to get enough to eat, to care experienced children threatened with homelessness, to children with Additional Support Needs being denied statutory support and the routine that comes with regular attendance at school. The Equalities and Human Rights Committee undertaking an inquiry provides additional scrutiny to the ad-hoc Covid Committee and will support the Parliament as a whole to play its role as a human rights guarantor.”

**Judith Robertson, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, said:**

“We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry, ensuring that the human rights implications of the measures taken at this time of crisis are subject to regular review and parliamentary scrutiny. It is crucial that human rights laws and standards are at the forefront of government action, and we hope that this inquiry will provide an understanding of the impact of the measures taken on the most vulnerable in society.

“The Scottish Parliament has an important role here, working together with us as human rights and equality bodies, other regulatory and oversight bodies, civil society and people who are most impacted by the current situation to develop that understanding and potentially improve policy and practise as a consequence.”

**ENDS**For further information please contact:

Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland: vonnie.sandlan@equalityhumanrights.com / 07401 278778

Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland:
ezmie.mccutcheon@cypcs.org.uk / 07545 916031

Scottish Human Rights Commission:
emma.hutton@scottishhumanrights.com / 07833 402289

**Notes to editors**

1. The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the National Equality Body (NEB) for Scotland, England and Wales. We work to eliminate discrimination and promote equality across the [nine protected characteristics](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics) set out in the Equality Act 2010. We are an 'A Status' National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and share our mandate to promote and protect human rights in Scotland with the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC).
2. Established by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003, the Commissioner is responsible for promoting and safeguarding the rights of all children and young people in Scotland, giving particular attention to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Commissioner is fully independent of the Scottish Government and Parliament.
3. The Scottish Human Rights Commission was established by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006, and formed in 2008. The Commission is the National Human Rights Institution for Scotland, accredited with ‘A Status’ within the United Nations system, and is independent of the Scottish Government and Parliament in the exercise of its functions. The Commission has a general duty to promote human rights and a series of specific powers to protect human rights for everyone in Scotland.

**John added:**

“Actions taken as a result of the powers in the Act will impact differently on different people, and in particular on those sharing protected characteristics. It’s essential that the Scottish Government’s reporting captures these different impacts with a view to eradicating or at least minimising any consequent disadvantage.

“Reporting which takes protected characteristics into account will enable the Scottish Government to better discharge its obligations to give regard to opportunities to advance equality and non-discrimination when using powers in the Act.

“The Commission will monitor the reporting of how powers in the Act are used and stands ready to help the Scottish Government develop the reporting guidelines.”

The Commission produced a [briefing for Members of the Scottish Parliament](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/ehrc_scotland_briefing_for_covid-19_emergency_legislation_march_2020.docx) on equality concerns prior to the introduction of the Bill to Parliament.

**Background**

Section 8A of Part 2 of the Act was proposed by Ruth Maguire MSP and agreed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament.

Section 8A states:

**Advancement of equality and non-discrimination**

In exercising a function conferred by virtue of Part 1 (including a function of making subordinate legislation), the Scottish Ministers must have regard to opportunities to advance equality and non-discrimination

Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs and lead minister for the Act’s passage through Parliament, [told Members of the Scottish Parliament that](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12602&i=113955&c=2252979#ScotParlOR):

“We are already looking at the reporting guidelines. I am commissioning work on that, and I want that work to be influenced by whatever structure comes into place, so that we are all clear what the reporting guidelines are, how that information is brought together and how it is then disseminated.”

**ENDS**

For further information please contact vonnie.sandlan@equalityhumanrights.com