



Women and Equalities Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From the Chair

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Minister for Women and Equalities
Government Equalities Office

29 April 2020

Dear Liz,

Coronavirus Act: Equalities Assessment

Thank you again for attending our first virtual evidence session on 22 April, and for the assistance from you and your office in helping it to proceed with no technical difficulties.

We wanted to follow-up with you on an issue we believe is vitally important to those groups and individuals who are looking at the impact of COVID-19 on people with protected characteristics.

The Impact Assessment for the Coronavirus Act states that an equalities assessment was “carried out separately, as part of the Public Sector Equalities Duty”. This equalities assessment has not yet been published. You said this was because there could be “a chilling effect on being frank in those assessments”, if the people preparing them knew they would be published. You added that such assessments were “internal documents to help inform the Government”.

We are deeply concerned the impact assessment has not been published and do not agree that the purpose is to inform Government only. This is certainly one of the purposes but publishing these assessments allows experts, interest groups and, crucially, those most affected to help shape the Government’s plans to mitigate impacts. It also allows those who may be particularly affected by a policy or legislation to better understand what might happen to them as a result.

These are difficult times and we already know some groups, such as those above a certain age, are at greater risk from coronavirus. We also know they will experience specific impacts from Government measures to protect public health. Many individuals and groups submitting evidence to our inquiry have highlighted how they consider the existing measures to have disproportionately impacted them. Such measures may, of course, be necessary and unavoidable. Surely, in a fair and democratic society, it is only right that we are able to have an open conversation about the equalities assessment; to allow Committees such as ours, individuals and other groups to scrutinise the Government’s work and contribute to mitigating any negative consequences

We therefore ask that the Government publish the equalities assessment immediately. I look forward to receiving your response.

Best wishes,

Caroline

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee