TACKLING SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES LOCALLY

Good practices in the implementation of the socio-economic duty by local authorities in England.

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FOREWORD

Just Fair is delighted to publish this short report arising from its partnership with Happen Together. The report explores the motives and best practices of seven local authorities that are tackling the effects of socio-economic inequality on the people living in their area.

The connection between economic inequality and discrimination on the grounds of specific characteristics protected by the in-force provisions of the Equality Act 2010, namely sex, race and disability, is well established. Reducing those historic inequalities is simply not possible without addressing the material conditions under which they materialise and take root.

Moreover, the relationship between wealth and income inequalities and human rights is becoming equally well established. The empirical evidence demonstrates a strong correlation between high levels of inequality and worse outcomes for all. For example, in more equal societies people live longer, are less likely to be mentally ill or obese and experience lower rates of infant mortality, whereas inequality increases property and violent crime.

For these reasons, Just Fair has been campaigning to have the duty contained in section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 brought into force since 2015 when it made its first submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as part of the Committee’s 6th Periodic Review of the UK’s performance under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In that submission the Just Fair Consortium urged the Committee to recommend that the UK government bring the duty into force in order that it improve its human rights record. The Equality and Human Rights Commission made a very similar submission to the Committee.

The UN Committee acceded to these submissions and included in its 2016 final report a recommendation that the UK Government “bring into force the relevant provisions of the Equality Act that refer to the public authorities’ duty on socio-economic disadvantage ... in order to enhance and guarantee full and effective protection against discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.”

In 2017 Just Fair, with its partner the Equality Trust, launched the #1forEquality campaign. The campaign has attracted a high number of supporters from academia, the law and other areas of public and private life. So far, its Early Day Motion has attracted 78 MPs from five different political parties.

Meanwhile, Scotland has taken its own decision to bring the socio-economic duty to life and there are reasons to believe the Welsh Assembly may soon follow suit.

The findings of this research study confirm Just Fair’s view that the bringing into force of the duty would make a tangible and significant contribution towards reducing the adverse consequences of economic inequality and improve the extent to which human rights are protected, and thereby benefit all of us.

Jamie Burton
Chair, Just Fair
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The extent of wealth and income inequality is of widespread concern in England; yet there is no national policy agenda focused specifically on tackling disadvantage caused by socio-economic inequality, whether by reducing poverty or promoting inclusive growth. Since the Grenfell Tower disaster in June 2017, the focus on the national picture has extended to local authorities.

This research explores how a selected number of English local authorities are tackling socio-economic disadvantage. It also examines how a legally enforceable duty in the form of section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 would support this endeavour.

Section 1 would require public authorities to consider how the exercise of all of their functions affects, or could affect, those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and how the authority could positively contribute to reducing it. Successive UK governments have declined to bring the duty into force, despite calls for its enactment by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism.

Why are the authorities tackling socio-economic disadvantage?

For the majority of the authorities, the impact of austerity measures since 2010 has created an incentive to act, both because of the direct consequences for residents and the pressures being experienced on public service delivery. Changes to welfare benefits and, in particular, the implementation of Universal Credit, were also cited as a significant motivation by several authorities. Some authorities appeared to recognize the medium to long term financial benefits of reducing socio-economic inequality.

How are the authorities tackling socio-economic disadvantage?

The research identified five features as being essential to local authorities’ efforts to initiate and sustain work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and to ensure that it is rigorous and systematic.
Interviewees ventured that it is vital that someone senior, the Leader or an Executive Member of a local authority, champions work on tackling socio-economic disadvantage and communicates clearly and consistently why it is a priority. There is also a strong feeling that it is necessary to have, as far as possible, local cross-party support for this agenda.

For example, City of York Council has created a Financial Inclusion Steering Group, which has Executive Member and senior officer engagement and distributes upwards of £300,000 of funding in crisis loans and financial inclusion initiatives.

Respondents laid great emphasis on the need to embed the priority to tackle socio-economic disadvantage within all levels of decision-making in the local authority, in order to ensure that it survives changes in political administration, council leadership, corporate strategy or national policy agendas. Several authorities involved in this research had initiated work in this area by means of a Fairness Commission. All of the authorities had implemented the Living Wage for employees; several, including Newcastle City Council, review this annually in line with the Living Wage Foundation, thus exceeding the National Living Wage.

Undertaking systematic and transparent assessments of the immediate and cumulative impact of council decisions on particular groups of residents provides tangible evidence of a council’s commitment to reducing inequality. It also provides a valuable insight into how the socio-economic duty would be implemented if in force. This practice is influenced by, and aligned with, the equalities impact assessment process adopted by councils to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

For example, Oldham Council’s Equality Impact Assessments integrate socio-economic disadvantage by means of a proxy indicator of “people on low incomes”. Assessments are not regarded as a one-off task; rather, using a specialised toolkit, officers periodically reconsider the impact of policy, and the environment within which it is being implemented, and where necessary take mitigating action or consult further with residents.

Newcastle City Council, meanwhile, has designed a council tax reduction scheme that takes account of income and family circumstances, including the need to support single parents and looked-after children entering adulthood; in 2018, this scheme is forecast to help almost 15,000 claimants.
Both qualitative and quantitative data, suitably disaggregated, is identified as being necessary to facilitate decision-making on socio-economic disadvantage and to ensure transparency and accountability. All the authorities involved in this research have in place a wide range of local data and needs assessments of residents and communities, as well as a significant amount of shared data with health services, the police and other partners.

Bristol City Council, for instance, has a One City Plan which seeks to strengthen the sharing and use of data in order to create a fair and inclusive city. Almost 50 local level indicators give an overall assessment of the wellbeing of citizens and communities in terms of sustainability, equality and other domains. Unemployment, overwork and deprivation, for instance, feature within the indicators in the Work and Economy domain.

Requiring systematic consultation with those identified as socio-economically disadvantaged, in the same way as those communities defined by existing protected characteristics, translates into active engagement with residents and communities in the decision-making process. Interviewees also identified the voluntary and community sector as providing both “critical challenge” of council decision-making and innovative ideas to identify and meet residents’ needs.

Manchester City Council, for instance, cited an understanding of socio-economic disadvantage as being important to the allocation of grants. The council ensures that it funds activity which will support its priorities, including building on Manchester’s economic strengths and reducing socio-economic disadvantage, thereby promoting inclusive growth.
Views of local authorities about an enforceable duty
Respondents were asked to what extent a legally-enforceable socio-economic would affect their current action to tackle socio-economic disadvantage. Potential advantages cited included:

- achieving greater consistency in practice - and an increased likelihood of maintaining such consistent practice across political administrations and between changes of individual leadership and turnover of staff;
- supporting cross-border and cross-department working;
- creating an incentive for greater transparency by means of systematic data gathering and analysis, especially in the conduct of equality impact assessments, thereby strengthening accountability; and
- providing a framework within which residents can participate in decisions that affect them, especially in the context of (proposed) cuts to services (as evidenced by the impact of fairness commissions).

Recommended next steps
A number of areas for further work were identified by the research team and informants, including the following:

- understanding the interaction of the socio-economic duty with the Public Sector Equality Duty and developing a holistic approach to equalities;
- an in-depth study to elucidate how treating section 1 as a de facto legal duty impacts upon how decisions are made;
- greater understanding of causation in respect of decision-making and policy development to address socio-economic disadvantage and the resulting impact on residents’ lives; and
- development of an evaluative framework to compare and contrast the effectiveness of varied approaches to the implementation of the socio-economic duty.

In the future, Scotland will provide valuable evidence through implementation of the Fairer Scotland Duty, the name given to the socio-economic duty in force there since April 2018.

All the councils involved in this study expressed a desire to learn from others. Councils would benefit from opportunities to share practice, engage in shared problem-solving and receive guidance on how to meaningfully implement the duty effectively, including the relationship with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Conclusions
Despite the necessary limitation on the scope of this study, Just Fair believes it allows for some tentative conclusions to be drawn.

First, local authorities’ motives for tackling socio-economic inequality and its adverse consequences extend beyond moral and ethical concerns to include medium to long term financial planning. Just Fair considers it significant that the voluntary adoption of a responsibility to tackle socio-economic disadvantage was cited by many interviewees as being motivated by a need to achieve financial efficiencies and inform tough decisions about the allocation of resources that are required to be made.

Secondly, a strong and visible commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage at a senior level is critically important, as is the embedding of a cultural shift across an authority in support of addressing socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination wherever it arises.

Thirdly, equally important is the deployment of various practices that act as key drivers to success. Three actions in particular were associated with beneficial outcomes for people affected by socio-economic disadvantage:
1. Meaningful impact assessments to understand residents’ needs
2. Using data effectively as a tool in decision-making and accountability
3. Engaging with residents, civil society and voluntary and community sector organisations
Just Fair is struck by the extent to which the best practices being used by the authorities included in the study reflect what would be required of them were section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 to be in force. In order to comply with section 1, public authorities would need to make their strategic decisions with due regard to the desirability of designing their actions in such a way as to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. Demonstrating compliance will necessitate robust evidence gathering, verifiable impact assessments, and genuine and meaningful engagement with people affected by socio-economic disadvantage.

This research therefore suggests that even those authorities that are committed to tackling socio-economic disadvantage would benefit from having to comply with the duty as it would import the best practices being deployed successfully by the authorities which are the subject if this study. This view was shared by some of the senior officers and members interviewed.

Overall, Just Fair is encouraged in its opinion that section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 should be in force across the UK as it would contribute positively towards a reduction in the extent of disadvantage being experienced on the grounds of socio-economic inequality.

Finally, all the authorities included in this study expressed a desire to learn about the best practice of other authorities tackling socio-economic disadvantage. There would therefore be considerable merit in a more in-depth and systematic study and the subsequent dissemination of any best practice observed, alongside further opportunities for peer learning amongst local authorities.

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INTRODUCTION

The extent of wealth and income inequalities is of widespread concern. In England, the focus on the national and regional picture has extended to local authorities after the Grenfell Tower disaster.

The disadvantages that arise from significant disparities in socio-economic status are well understood and uncontroversial. Moreover, inequality is plainly both a cause and result of failures in human rights protection.

Despite this, there is no national policy agenda in England focused specifically on tackling socio-economic disadvantage, whether by reducing poverty or promoting inclusive growth.

Indeed, a principal legislative measure designed to assist in tackling disadvantages caused by socio-economic inequality, section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, has not been brought into force by successive UK governments.

However, some local authorities are consciously trying to address the effects of socio-economic disadvantage in their area and in the case of at least one authority, Newcastle City Council, treating the duty as if it were in force.

With its partner, the Equality Trust, Just Fair has been campaigning to have the duty brought into force. ¹

The purpose of the research was to establish:

1. how some of these authorities are going about tackling socio-economic disadvantage in their area;
2. whether any best practice could be identified;
3. how a legally enforceable duty in the form of section 1 Equality Act 2010 might assist in tackling socio-economic disadvantage or the promotion of best practice; and,
4. what further research might be possible and useful

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¹ At the time of writing, 78 MPs from Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru have signed Early Day Motion 591 calling on the Government to bring the socio-economic duty into force.
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

The Equality Act 2010 was designed to strengthen and harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination law. The “public sector duty regarding socio-economic inequalities” (“the socio-economic duty”) contained in Sections 1-3 (Part I) requires public bodies:

“when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise [their] functions [to] have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.”

Were it to be in force the socio-economic duty would complement the Public Sector Equality Duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires public bodies to have “due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities” on the grounds of the nine listed “protected characteristics” (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).

Although the socio-economic duty does not oblige public authorities to achieve reductions in socio-economic inequalities or the disadvantages that flow from them, it would require them to consider how the exercise of all of their functions affects, or could affect, those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and how the authority could positively contribute to reducing it. In order to demonstrate compliance with the duty public authorities would have to adopt effective and transparent processes which measure the impact of their decisions on socio-economic disadvantage.

Both the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have called on the UK Government to bring the socio-economic duty into effect. After her official mission to the UK last May, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism noted with concern the Government’s disregard for the duty. In announcing its project into the Grenfell Tower disaster in December 2017, the EHRC specifically stated that it will examine whether the socio-economic duty, “if in force, would have made any difference to what happened”. The duty would also help the UK abide by the Sustainable Development Goal No. 10 to reduce material inequality nationally.

While not necessarily in the form a public duty like section 1 of our Equality Act 2010, at least 20 other European countries provide legal protection against discrimination on a ground related to socio-economic status.

Notably, in April 2018 the Scottish Parliament enacted the Fairer Scotland Duty, which is the name given to the socio-economic duty in force there, and meanwhile the introduction of the duty was endorsed by the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee and by the External Affairs and Legislation Committee of the National Assembly for Wales/Senedd.

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2. Just Fair is the author of the chapter on reducing inequalities (SDG No. 10) in the first analysis of the UK’s compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals, coordinated by UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD). The report will be made public in July 2018.
METHODOLOGY

The authorities which contributed to this research are the Metropolitan Boroughs of Manchester, Newcastle, Oldham and Wigan; the Unitary Authorities of Bristol City and City of York; and the London Borough Council of Islington.

The selection process was as follows: initial contacts were made with authorities identified by Just Fair during its work on socio-economic inequality and human rights. A snowball sampling approach was then employed through discussion with those authorities and with representatives from the Local Government Association. Contact was purposefully pursued with authorities which would provide examples across council type, geographical location and political control.

Of those chosen, only one, Newcastle City Council, has explicitly decided to treat the duty contained in section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 as if it were in force. The other authorities were identified as undertaking a range of activities designed to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and thus acting in the spirit of the duty.

The following criteria were used to consider the extent to which the authorities are implementing the socio-economic duty:

- Tackling socio-economic disadvantage is expressed as a priority within strategic planning, including but not limited to corporate plans, economic development strategy, “state of the city” reports and by council leadership.
- Transparent and accountable consideration of socio-economic disadvantage is built into annual budget setting and all key decision-making processes, including scrutiny arrangements.
- Decision-making is supported by systematic assessment of impact, using both quantitative and qualitative data, with appropriate tracking and review; ideally integrated with the equalities impact assessment to identify intersectional disadvantage and discrimination.
- Meaningful participation and consultation takes place with residents, communities and other stakeholders.
- The duty is communicated within the induction and training of staff and elected members.
- Reducing inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage is evident in the design and day-to-day delivery of front-line services, including through commissioning and procurement.

The most tangible evidence for implementation is the availability of systematic assessments of the impact of decision-making on those residents who are socio-economically disadvantaged, alongside policy agendas focused on the needs of these residents. Information and views for this study were gathered through a strategy of desktop research and interviews with 20 respondents, including council representatives. Interviews were, where possible, conducted with both an executive member and a senior officer with responsibility for equality and/or socio-economic disadvantage in each of the authorities. Interviews took place either face-to-face or through video-conference between March and April 2018.
Short case studies are designed to provide illustration and further tangible details for consideration by others.

Contributions were also made by the Local Government Association, the Women’s Budget Group and Citizens Advice York.

**Limitations of the research**

We encountered several challenges to conducting research of local authorities’ work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage which placed limitations on the ability to critically appraise decision-making processes. These included: a significant turnover of staff within local councils since 2010, with many specialist equalities posts and even whole departments having been cut or merged; changes of administration which may make a newly-elected administration ignorant of or unwilling to acknowledge the approach taken by its predecessor and discontinuity within authorities under the same political control. Overall, we frequently came across a lack of institutional memory within local authorities both as to activity undertaken and the original motivation for that activity. These methodological challenges were mitigated, where possible, by interviewing more than one person in each local authority and in one case by consulting representatives of civil society who had monitored the work of relevant local authority in this area.

The validation of the practices examined in this research has also been limited by the necessarily restricted sample size in respect of the types of authorities, their geographical spread and their political profile. Future research in this area would benefit from both greater breadth (a wider range of authorities) and depth (more intensive research within the selected authorities).

Another substantial methodological challenge relates to the attribution of impact directly to the decisions taken and policies implemented: in other words, it is not always straightforward or even possible to identify causality between the policy devised and implemented and the effects of the policy in reducing socio-economic disadvantage. However, where the authority has strong practice in place for the systematic and transparent assessment of impact and its review, there is more likely to be an identifiable link to impact. Ultimately, those councils who are committed to addressing socio-economic disadvantage must find ways to explore the efficacy of their measures.

Fig. 1 Contributing councils
WHY ARE THE AUTHORITIES TACKLING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE?

The primary driver stated for taking action to address socio-economic disadvantage was overwhelmingly that it is the “right thing to do”. Changes to welfare benefits and, in particular, the implementation of Universal Credit, were further directly cited as a significant motivation by over half of the Councils. For the majority of the authorities, the impact of austerity measures since 2010 has created an incentive to act, both because of the direct consequences for residents and the pressures being experienced on public service delivery in the face of significant cuts to available public spending. A number of councils referenced the expectation of the complete removal of government grants by 2020 as a motivating factor for their corporate focus on socio-economic disadvantage. These authorities appeared to recognize the medium to long term financial benefits of reducing socio-economic inequality.

The socio-economic duty is seen as one legislative and policy lever available for tackling socio-economic disadvantage. Other levers cited as key in taking action to tackle socio-economic disadvantage were: fairness commissions, the Equality Framework for Local Government, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, commissioning and procurement practice, planning legislation, pension funds investment and the need to set an example as a large local employer.

Councils acknowledged they are not acting alone locally; Health and Wellbeing Boards, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local community partnerships were cited. However, there was acknowledgement that joint working is challenging in a period of sustained austerity across all public spending.
HOW ARE THE AUTHORITIES TACKLING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE?

Here, we divide our findings into two areas. The first examines the common organisational features that underpin local authorities’ work on socio-economic disadvantage, which interviewees identified as prerequisites for such work to be established and maintained. These are:

1. VISIBLE LEADERSHIP
2. CREATING A CULTURAL SHIFT

The second area relates to areas of best practice in work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage; these are:

3. MEANINGFUL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS WHICH IDENTIFY, AND TAKE INTO ACCOUNT, RESIDENTS’ NEEDS
4. USING DATA EFFECTIVELY AS A TOOL IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY
5. ENGAGING WITH RESIDENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Taken together, these five features were identified as essential to local authorities’ efforts to initiate and sustain work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and to ensure that such work is rigorous and systematic. The five features are presented below with illustrative case studies.
Without exception the authorities interviewed for this research demonstrated a clear political will at executive level to tackle socio-economic disadvantage. While the language used to express this differs, clear messages from political leadership was evident in all the authorities and conveyed through their stated priorities and the rhetoric of tackling socio-economic disadvantage being “the right thing to do”.

The authorities see the benefits as accruing not only to those residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, but also, indirectly, to all residents and to the authority itself in defining the expectations of what can and should be delivered with fewer resources. Councils clearly identify themselves as having a purpose to protect the most vulnerable and excluded.

It is stated as being essential that someone senior, the Leader or an Executive Member, champions the work on tackling socio-economic disadvantage and communicates clearly and consistently why it is a priority. There is also a strong feeling that it is necessary to have, as far as possible, cross-party support at a local level for this agenda.

Political will, coupled with identifiable leadership from a senior officer or group of senior officers, was reported as being critical to delivering success in practice. It is generally recognised that effectively translating this political will into policy and service design, training and induction of staff, and frontline delivery with residents, requires a focal point at senior officer level capable of actively championing work on socio-economic disadvantage to keep it at the forefront of the authority’s agenda. There was acknowledgement in some authorities that significant cuts to senior and leadership roles has disrupted such senior officer engagement.

For City of York Council, work on socio-economic disadvantage is closely linked to its role within York, City of Human Rights where the focus of action is the annual “York Human Rights Indicator Report: Human Rights: Reclaiming the Positive”.

This report homes in on human rights protection in five areas that have been selected as local priorities by the people of York: equality and non-discrimination, education, a decent standard of living, housing, and health and social care.

The indicator report shows that, whilst York median income is improving more than the national median, people with lower earnings are not seeing the same rate of improvement, with the earnings gap between mid-point earnings and mid low-point earnings in York having increased by around 7% from 2015/16 to 2016/17. As a result of this, “the Council is mobilising its policy and strategy across a number of areas to address this increasing income inequality”, according to Charlie Croft, Assistant Director on Communities and Equalities.
CASE STUDY 2: LEADERSHIP ON FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN THE CITY OF YORK

York’s Financial Inclusion Steering Group has been in place since 2012. The leadership group retains Executive Member and senior officer engagement and includes key representatives from the voluntary and community sector with the membership of Citizens Advice York and South Yorkshire Credit Union. A wider networking group is in place with inclusion of other council and external partners.

Tasked with implementation of the Financial Inclusion Policy and Action Plan, the leadership group is the driving force behind the City Council’s commitments in the Financial Inclusion Policy, supporting the City’s Economic Strategy. The leadership group distributes upwards of £300,000 of funding in crisis loans and financial inclusion initiatives. A thematic annual approach acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of financial inclusion, with a focus on mental health in 2018.

For Councillor Runciman, the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health, the Steering Group’s distribution of funds achieves tangible benefits for the residents of York. Raising awareness and influencing policy are, in Councillor Runciman’s view, essential in a city that might be perceived not to suffer from severe socio-economic disadvantage, but within which “pockets of deprivation” do exist in many different forms.

CASE STUDY 3: DEVOLUTION FOR NORTH OF TYNE: TACKLING LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

For Newcastle City Council, an explicit commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage influenced its approach, with partner authorities, to securing a devolution deal that enables North of Tyne to better address the challenges associated with long-term unemployment. The devolution deal places a strong emphasis on “inclusive growth”, ensuring that investment in economic development generates good quality employment and enables residents to access job opportunities.

A regional joint commission for health and social care integration played an influential role in demonstrating the need for prioritised investment in education, employment and skills. The 2016 report ‘Health and Wealth - Closing the Gap in the North East’ established a correlation between residents’ poor health and wellbeing, inability to work and experience of the poverty trap which influenced the deal. According to Councillor McCarty, Deputy Council Leader, the targeted resources and powers enshrined in the deal will “deliver tailored employment and skills support to the working age population”, which “should help more residents to overcome socio-economic disadvantage by improving opportunities to enter and progress within the local labour market”. 
A sustained focus on socio-economic disadvantage is seen as requiring a “cultural shift” in an authority as part of a broader local narrative about its ethos. The importance placed on an understanding by staff of “what we are about” in addressing the needs of those residents who are socio-economically disadvantaged is clearly demonstrated within corporate strategy; see, for example, the “Wigan Deal”, “Towards a fairer Islington”, “Our Manchester” and City of York Council’s “A prosperous city for all”. For Oldham, a co-operative council, fairness sits at the heart of the co-operative charter alongside openness, responsibility, working together, accountability, respect and democracy.

Generating a change in council culture to secure a “stronger lens on the importance of addressing socio-economic disadvantage” helps to ensure an ethos survives changes in political administration, senior officers, corporate strategies or national policy agendas. Having an authentic focus on tackling socio-economic disadvantage by staff at all levels is key to the delivery of tangible benefits for residents.

A number of the authorities included in this study have instigated a public participative debate about what needs to happen to tackle inequality and poverty through the formation of a Fairness Commission. The first Commission was established in Islington in 2010, independently of the Council, and at least 23 followed across the country, including York, Newcastle, Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, Oldham and Bristol. The councils included in this study viewed the commissions as supporting the mandate of the council to focus and prioritise the needs of those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

More than one council spoke of the power of dialogue between council representatives and the public about fairness in decision-making. Directly understanding the lived experience of people’s lives provides a clear driver and justification for targeted action. In York, the executive member spoke of a decision led by adult social care teams to create regular, specific community-based occasions to speak to residents and learn about their needs as an example of creating this powerful cultural shift in “how we work here”.

CREATING A CULTURAL SHIFT
CASE STUDY 4: A CULTURE COMMITTED TO REDUCING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN ISLINGTON

The Executive Member for Finance, Performance & Community Safety at Islington Council, Councillor Andy Hull, is clear that talking about how the council can act to reduce poverty and inequality is a core part of its culture, and is a reason why people choose to work for the authority. Despite a wealthy image, Islington is the 24th most deprived local authority area in England. The ambition of political leaders in the authority is writ large through the organisation, enabling action to be taken and the Council to demonstrate its commitment to working in line with the socio-economic duty.

Islington established the first Fairness Commission in England in 2010, and Councillor Hull credits this with creating a clear narrative about inequality, and a driver to go above and beyond the council’s legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The priority is clear in the council’s vision and priorities, “Towards a Fairer Islington” and is embedded within the council’s staff induction and training process. Councillor Hull ventures that “winning …hearts and minds” within the council will enable the focus on tackling socio-economic disadvantage to be sustained in the longer-term.

CASE STUDY 5: IMPACT ON WELFARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS AND ADVICE PROVISION IN YORK AND NEWCASTLE

The need to understand and, where possible, address the impact of welfare reform on residents was cited by some authorities as a driver for using the socio-economic duty.

Both Newcastle and York have examples of how assessing the impact of council budget proposals has shaped their approach to mitigating benefit cuts. This constitutes identifiable local action in line with the EHRC’s recommendation to use existing legislation to “rethink those policies that have contributed to increased levels of poverty and inequality and consider what it can do to mitigate the impact of policy decisions taken in the past” [EHRC, Progress on socio-economic rights in Great Britain, 2018, p. 9].

In Newcastle, Deputy Leader Cllr McCarty explained how adopting the socio-economic duty through the use of integrated impact assessments had directly influenced spending priorities, resulting in continued funding for the Council’s Welfare Rights Service. The assessment process and work on financial inclusion means the authority has clear sight of the amount of resources welfare rights advice has secured for residents and households in the city, together with a full understanding of the negative impacts should the service be reduced or withdrawn. Newcastle also emphasised the importance of investing in information-sharing across the authority, and with partners, to build a picture of residents’ financial circumstances, noting that its joined-up approach has prevented escalating debts from pushing people into crisis.

In York, a key priority of the Financial Inclusion Steering Group has been to ensure the provision of welfare advice, especially in light of the impact of Universal Credit and the increasing incidence of rental arrears. This is secured through investment in voluntary sector organisations, including service level agreements with Citizens Advice and the Welfare Benefits Unit, while also securing innovative advice delivery through allocating annual small grants. One such scheme has been delivered by Citizens Advice offering advice in GP surgeries, and its success has resulted in it being considered as part of the organisation’s core service provision review.
Where there is a strong stated commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage, it is generally correlated with a high value being placed on demonstrating a detailed and meaningful understanding of the needs of residents and communities in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Undertaking systematic and transparent assessments of impact on tackling socio-economic disadvantage within all council decision-making provides some of the most tangible and clear evidence of a council’s commitment to reducing inequality. It also provides a valuable insight into how the socio-economic duty would be implemented if in force. This practice is heavily influenced by, and generally aligned with, the equalities impact process adopted by councils to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

For some, reframing equality impact assessments as Community Impact Assessments (Newcastle) or Resident Impact Assessments (Islington) aided this shift in understanding impact assessments as an essential part of “knowing your community”.

Training and awareness-raising for members in understanding socio-economic disadvantage, local context and impact, and their role in holding officers to account the quality and thoroughness of the assessment and decision-making processes, was expressed as being critical to meaningful decision making.

For example, Oldham Council referenced the importance of ensuring that members are fully aware and informed of decision-making that considers socio-economic disadvantage in order that it is effective. Further imperatives are the training of staff with responsibility for completing impact assessments; the provision of expertise in equalities issues to supplement specific service area knowledge; a robust quality assurance process; and a senior officer focal point in order to ensure accountability.

A number of councils, including Oldham, Newcastle and Manchester, discussed the existence of cross-council “challenge processes”, tasked with both quality assurance and the assessment of the cumulative impact of decisions on particular groups of residents. When looked at within the context of a council’s annual budget-setting process, undertaking some form of
cumulative impact assessment based on singular assessments is critical to identifying comprehensively the potential impact of proposals on specific groups. Similarly, having a process of review and tracking in place to identify the actual impact of decisions is crucial.

The intersection of the socio-economic duty with the existing Public Sector Equality Duty is of obvious importance. Discrimination and disadvantage tends to be multiple, cumulative and intersectional. There is also clear recognition of the interaction of socio-economic disadvantage with other issues such as health inequalities and the experiences of specific groups of residents, for example, the needs of looked-after children as cited by Newcastle, and the links with mental health identified in York. It is recognised that taking a holistic approach to equalities is a desirable outcome for policy and decision-making but also that this territory is complex and requires the further development of approaches to ensure that impact is felt across different areas of inequality.

**CASE STUDY 6: DELIVERING AND PROMOTING THE LIVING WAGE**

All of the council informants have implemented the Living Wage for employees, with a number of these, including Newcastle, reviewing this annually in line with the Living Wage Foundation, and thus exceeding the National Living Wage. In some councils, this policy originally arose from the recommendations of Fairness Commissions. While the policy may have been developed independently of the socio-economic duty, some interviewees drew an important connection between voluntarily implementation of the Living Wage and their commitment to the socio-economic duty, both being levers for promoting fairness and equality. Significant numbers of employees have benefited and across the workforces of these councils the action is a key policy lever to reduce the prevalence of in-work poverty, using the council's influence as a large employer. With increasing requirement for pay transparency and action to tackle pay inequality within all sectors of employment, it is evident that such initiatives impact particularly on low-paid, often part-time employees who are predominantly women, and often from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.
CASE STUDY 7: NEWCASTLE - COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Council Tax is increasingly an important revenue stream for councils and a tax that can impact heavily on residents who experience socio-economic disadvantage. Locally designed Council Tax Reduction Schemes can enable councils to “balance our need to raise enough revenue to invest in services with [the need to protect] the most vulnerable from the impact of these changes”. The Newcastle scheme considers whether working age people should pay in the region of 10% to 75% of their Council Tax, depending on their income and family circumstances, while taking account of Council Tax arrears, Universal Credit, and the impact of wider welfare reform changes. In 2018, this scheme is forecast to help 14,794 claimants.

A number of interrelated impacts have been identified in the design of this scheme, particularly support for single parents, the majority of whom are women and statistically more likely to be in low paid, part-time employment as well as looked after children entering young adulthood. Pro-actively considering the needs of looked after children has led to the development of a cross-council support package. Significantly, this also includes guaranteed interviews for apprenticeships, integrating both the socio-economic duty and the council’s duty as a corporate parent.

CASE STUDY 8: REVIEWING IMPACT ASSESSMENTS IN OLDHAM

In Oldham, there is a toolkit for officers which strengthens their understanding of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not simply as a “one-off process” but as one that requires further evaluative work, including reconsideration of the “operating environment in which the policy, project or proposal is taking place - political, economic/financial, social, technological, legal or environmental” and, where appropriate, further mitigating action and consultation with residents. Such reconsideration of the EIA may take place three, six or twelve months after its initial sign-off. The EIA integrates socio-economic disadvantage with the proxy indicator of “people on low incomes” and reviews are subject to a scrutiny process within the council.

CASE STUDY 9: IDENTIFYING AND MITIGATING IMPACT ON CARERS IN NEWCASTLE

Including socio-economic disadvantage within the Council’s cumulative impact assessment enabled Newcastle to identify the compound effects of national policy and funding changes for carers in the city and what could be done locally to mitigate its impact. Through the public consultation process, the implications of changes to funding for carer support services was not only highlighted, but also led to joint work with carers and voluntary organisations to redesign and commission a new package of support.
CASE STUDY 10: UNDERSTANDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IN DECISION-MAKING IN NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

Understanding the impact of decision-making on the city’s most socio-economically disadvantaged residents is integrated at every stage of Newcastle’s “A Fair Budget for a Fairer City”. All budget proposals are assessed using an Integrated Impact Assessment which considers the local strategic needs assessment, “Know Newcastle”, alongside service- and community-specific data, including qualitative feedback from consultation and engagement with those affected by potential service changes. All budget proposals are published both pre- and post-consultation to ensure that,

“Our decisions are based on the fullest possible understanding of how they are likely to affect people and places in the city, and in particular how the most vulnerable people and communities could be impacted. Each budget proposal is supported by an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) of its potential impact in a range of ways: on people and groups facing socio-economic disadvantage, in relation to health and wellbeing, community cohesion and safety, and the environment. We pay particular attention to our duty under the Equality Act 2010 to avoid unfair discrimination against people with protected characteristics.” [Newcastle City Council, Ambition in the face of austerity: Cumulative impact assessment 2016-17.

Alongside specific consideration of the Public Sector Equality Duty and its impact on residents with protected characteristics, the assessment considers impact on “people vulnerable to socio-economic disadvantage”. This is identified through five proxy groups or measures. Additional factors are examined if relevant to the specific proposal:

- People living in deprived areas.
- People in low paid employment or households of low income.
- People facing barriers to gaining employment, such as low levels of educational attainment.
- Looked after children.
- People facing multiple deprivation, through a combination of circumstances such as poor health or poor housing / homelessness.

Individual assessments are quality assured and information is gathered to support a Cumulative Impact Assessment, which contextualises the proposals by looking at the bigger picture trends and policy issues affecting those groups likely to be impacted. This information is then used in the council’s decision-making process.
Data is identified as necessary in delivering meaningful decision-making on socio-economic disadvantage. Yet understanding how to identify and measure socio-economic disadvantage remains a challenge for local authorities. There are both shared challenges across authorities and specific issues encountered due to the different nature of socio-economic disadvantage experienced within council areas. Some councils have wide-ranging deprivation levels across significant numbers of residents while some have smaller numbers of residents with relatively deeper levels of deprivation, who may or may not be grouped geographically.

All councils have a wide range of local data and needs assessments of residents and communities in place and a significant amount of shared data with health services, police and other partners, including those with a statutory underpinning. These include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Local Economic Assessment and, for many, an annual progress report on the delivery of corporate priorities; for example, the “State of the City” report in Manchester. These annual progress reports can enable a specific focus on, or research into, a particular issue. These analyses contain a vast amount of data related to socio-economic disadvantage, for example in considering rates of Free School Meals, rates of workless households, employment levels, average earnings and housing tenure.

It is necessary for councils to find proxy indicators to identify those groups of residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. As demonstrated in the case study on the impact assessment process, Newcastle has five core groups for this purpose; in Oldham the assessment process considers those “people on low incomes”; and in York there is a focus on “people living in the most deprived wards”. Identifying a core set of proxy indicators is important to ensure systematic and consistent action, identify cumulative impact and track actual impact.

Yet all of the councils responding to this study highlighted the need for budgetary or decision-specific flexibility on the data used to assess and mitigate socio-economic disadvantage. Islington, as a London borough with some of the most expensive housing costs in the country, emphasised the importance of understanding the nature and impact of housing tenure to address the needs of those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

A key message from those demonstrating action to tackle socio-economic disadvantage was to “proceed on the basis of available data, even if such data is incomplete”, while acknowledging that further work is needed. It is also important to make sure that quantitative data is considered alongside qualitative evidence of the lived experience of residents. Further, councils were keen to receive support and sharing of good practice in developing and analysing appropriate data.
CASE STUDY 11: BRISTOL JOINING UP THE DATA

A “Fair and Inclusive” city is a priority in the strategy of Bristol City Council. This emphasis was evident in the development of various initiatives: an Inclusive Economic Development Strategy; the “One City Plan”, a “collaborative partnership approach to how we work in the city”; and “One Public Estate”. The One City Plan seeks to strengthen the sharing and use of data across the city, utilising the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the Quality of Life survey with residents, and the Open Bristol Data platform. In addition, a new partnership has been formed with the Thriving Places Index. Forty-eight local level indicators give an overall assessment of the wellbeing of citizens and communities in terms of sustainability, local conditions, equality, and other domains. These are based on data drawn from, among other sources, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Public Health England (PHE) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation, a UK government qualitative study of deprived areas in English local councils. Unemployment, overwork and deprivation all feature within the six indicators in the Work and Economy domain.

Bristol City Council is considering the socio-economic duty as part of a review of equalities practice. It will be interesting to see how this innovative approach might impact on delivering the socio-economic duty. Bristol’s initiative echoes the approaches of a number of other councils to better understand and address the needs of communities: for example, the “Wigan Deal”, which aims to build on people’s existing assets and strengths and encourages resilience and independence; and Oldham’s “Thriving Communities” approach (part of the Oldham Plan 2017-22), which, among other things, seeks to move away from traditional, top down services to a more co-productive relationship, in which people are supported to do more for themselves and their communities.

ENGAGING WITH RESIDENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Requiring consultation systematically with those identified as socio-economically disadvantaged, in the same way as those communities defined by existing protected characteristics, translates into active engagement with residents and communities in the decision-making process. This is seen in the practice of consultation on annual budget proposals such as Newcastle City Council’s publication of proposals for “Newcastle 2020: Investing in a fairer future – One year On”, where proposals are published both pre- and post-consultation.

Reflecting on Newcastle’s experience, Deputy Leader Cllr McCarty cited the shift in terms of the voices that are now heard and the impact this has had on decision-making. While a significant consequence of Newcastle’s voluntary implementation of the duty, this outcome was not necessarily foreseen and nor did it influence the decision to treat s1 as a de facto duty. However, a number of other councils commented on the potential for the socio-economic duty to amplify the voice of residents that are commonly neglected or ignored by decision-makers.
Other authorities gave specific examples of debate shifting in favour of action to mitigate socio-economic disadvantage where traditionally such action may have been challenged by (or in the name of) residents or organisations with greater access and influence. The requirement to pro-actively seek the views of those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may, as Islington Cllr Andy Hull said, “put some wind in the sails” of engaging these groups in decision-making.

Alongside direct engagement with residents and communities, civil society organisations and the local voluntary and community sector has been important for councils. The role of the sector as a source of “critical challenge” was identified as important by all councils. Wigan and Manchester, in particular, identified the sector as a critical source of expertise, particularly in a climate where council staff have been subject to significant reductions. For some authorities, such as York, working more collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector creates benefits in terms of information flow, innovative ways of thinking and improved understanding of resident needs and service delivery options. Simon Topham, Chief Executive of York Citizens Advice, acknowledges the limitations of short-term and limited fund allocations yet adds that:

“work on the Financial Inclusion Steering Group [FISG] between City of York Council... [and its] housing department voluntary bodies, and a local credit union has helped address issues in targeted ways in deprived neighbourhoods... Even with limited budgets some positive outcomes have resulted from FISG funded projects where our evaluation has been able to show the financial impact of reduced energy costs, better managed debts and improvements in income for those citizens who rely on welfare benefits.”

**CASE STUDY 12: INVESTING IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: YORK AND MANCHESTER**

In York, consultation with residents, and ensuring that their voice is heard, is paired with a broader approach to building community resilience and grassroots community work around financial inclusion. Council-led Community Growth projects, such as in the Chapelfields area, aim to develop self-supported schemes. This is alongside the Financial Inclusion Group, which includes voluntary and community sector representation and invests annually in smaller grants. These are allocated to community groups to encourage innovative approaches like the delivery of financial advice in GP surgeries by Citizens Advice York; community-based Information and Budgeting Cafés’; and provision of the technology that is increasingly required to access the welfare system.

Manchester also cited an understanding of socio-economic disadvantage as being important to the allocation of grants through programmes such as the Clean City and Manchester Investment funds, and the Our Manchester Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Programme. By aligning its grant programme to the Our Manchester strategy, the council ensures that it funds activity which will support the strategy’s thematic ambitions. These include building on Manchester’s economic strengths and reducing socio-economic disadvantage, thereby promoting inclusive growth. The council encourages its partners to adopt a similar strategic alignment.

**CASE STUDY 13: SETTING OUT THE WIGAN DEAL**

In Wigan, the implementation of the socio-economic duty within decision-making supports the Council’s delivery of “The Wigan Deal”. The Deal sets out “an informal agreement between the Council and everyone who lives or works here to work together to create a better borough”. The “Deal for the Future” sets out the vision and plan to achieve this, with public consultation on the priorities, and difficult decisions required to achieve a further £45 million of savings by 2020.
Respondents were asked to what extent having the socio-economic duty in place as a legal requirement would make a difference to their current action to tackle socio-economic disadvantage.

Potential advantages cited included:

- greater consistency in practice and an increased likelihood of maintaining such consistent practice across political administrations and between changes of individual leadership and turnover of staff;
- the value of a legal duty to support cross-border and cross-department working;
- the creation of an incentive for greater transparency in systematic data gathering and analysis within the decision-making process; and
- providing a framework within which residents can participate in decisions that affect them, especially in the context of (proposed) cuts to services (as evidenced by the impact of fairness commissions).

Some authorities warned about the risk of superficial implementation in the form of “box ticking”. This observation highlights the importance, noted above, of creating a cultural shift within authorities, which indeed may be both a cause and consequence of more systematic work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage.

Nevertheless, some council officers and members acknowledged the value in the duty as a tool to ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making and effectively to assess the potential and actual impact of decisions upon different groups of residents. The duty was described by one council as “the ideal tool to deliver on our priority for addressing inequalities” and by another as a “no-brainer” in “furthering the impact analysis of our budget decisions in the face of reducing resources”.

Allied to this is a sense that, as noted above, where the duty is being treated as “effectively in force” and is embedded in the formal decision-making process, it will be more difficult to roll back with a change of either individual leadership or political administration. In York, for example, the commitment to prioritise financial inclusion has continued across a variety of changes to the make-up of the political administrations.
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

A number of areas for further work were identified by the research team and informants:

- understanding the interaction of the socio-economic duty with the Public Sector Equality Duty in practice for councils, i.e. working to deliver a “holistic” approach to equalities;

- greater engagement with council members and staff, voluntary and civil society organisations, residents and other stakeholders to support participative, problem-solving conversations on effective strategies to tackle socio-economic disadvantage in light of the duty;

- an in-depth study to elucidate how treating s1 as a de facto legal duty impacts upon how decisions are made, including the role of public consultation and participation;

- greater understanding of causation in respect of decision-making and policy development to address socio-economic disadvantage and the resulting impact on residents’ lives;

- development of an evaluative framework to compare and contrast the effectiveness of varied approaches to the implementation of the socio-economic duty; and

- broader access to councils of different types, including two-tier councils and providing opportunities to bring councils together to share practice through the research process.

In the future, Scotland will provide valuable evidence, building on the interim guidance for public bodies to comply with the new Fairer Scotland Duty, which is the name given to the socio-economic duty in force there since April 2018.

All of the councils involved in this study expressed a desire to learn from others. Councils would therefore benefit from opportunities to share practice, engage in shared problem-solving and receive guidance on how to meaningfully implement the duty effectively, including the relationship with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Through its work on social justice and human rights it has become apparent to Just Fair that, despite the absence of any legal duty to do so, many local authorities in England are explicitly addressing the impact of socio-economic inequality on the residents in their area when devising and implementing their policies. This seemed important and therefore we decided to research some of these authorities to better understand their motivations and practices in this context.

As might be expected, and welcomed, motives to act included ethical and moral concerns about inequality and poverty. The research reveals motivations of a different kind are equally common: in particular, some authorities recognized the medium to long term financial benefits of reducing socio-economic inequality. This was considered especially important in times of very significant financial constraint when tough decisions about the allocation of resources are required to be made. Just Fair considers it significant that the voluntary adoption of a responsibility to tackle socio-economic disadvantage was cited by many as being motivated by a need to achieve financial efficiencies.

The findings of our research allow us to draw some tentative conclusions about best practice in tackling socio-economic disadvantage, how a legally enforceable duty in the form of section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 might encourage those practices and what further research would be beneficial.

All the authorities included in this research demonstrated a clear political will at executive level to reduce the effects socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst this was perhaps to be expected of councils that were doing more than the law required of them, it is nevertheless the case that all of the people spoken to in the course of this research emphasised the need for there to be a visible commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage at a senior level. Not only did this give the necessary strategic perspective and consistency of purpose, providing a focal point and galvanising efforts across the authority, it kept the work at the forefront of the authority’s agenda.

Allied to strong leadership, working to establish a cultural change in a particular authority and its partners was also consistently stated to be imperative in order to ensure work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage survived changes in political leadership or other forms of reorganisation or policy shift, whether internal or imposed by central government.

The central importance of there being a commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage both at the most senior level and culturally embedded within a council was emphasised to the extent that we determined it to be imperative to the successful reduction in socio-economic disadvantage in a local authority.

Equally important however is the deployment of various practices that act as key drivers to success. Our research revealed that three actions in particular were associated with beneficial outcomes for people affected by socio-economic disadvantage:

1. Meaningful impact assessments to understand residents’ needs
2. Using data effectively as a tool in decision-making and accountability
3. Engaging with residents, civil society and voluntary and community sector organisations

There are common aspects to these best practices. First, they provide an objective and verifiable source against which the actions of the authorities can be assessed and therefore enhance transparency and accountability in the authority. Second, they help ensure that the work is targeted and formulated on the basis of what is known about socio-economic disadvantage in their area and the lived experiences of those affected.
CONCLUSIONS

Third, the practices reinforce the need to undertake the work and provide an opportunity for the council to understand that the positive effects of their work in this area is being appreciated.

In Just Fair’s opinion, systematic and meaningful engagement with the people affected by socio-economic disadvantage is the most compelling justification for the introduction of the duty. The representation this affords to people who may otherwise fall outside the democratic process also provides an opportunity for measures to be effectively co-designed with their intended beneficiaries.

Just Fair is struck by the extent to which the best practices being used by the authorities included in the study reflect what would be required of them were section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 to be in force. In order to comply with section 1, public authorities would need to make their strategic decisions with due regard to the desirability of designing their actions in such a way as to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. Demonstrating compliance will necessitate robust evidence gathering, verifiable impact assessments, and genuine and meaningful engagement with people affected by socio-economic disadvantage.

Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 would not of itself oblige local authorities to eliminate or even necessarily reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage in their area. Hence, it will always be the case that such inequalities of outcome will only ever be tackled by authorities where there is the political and institutional will to do so. However, this research suggests that even those authorities that are committed to tackling socio-economic disadvantage would benefit from having to comply with the duty as it would import the best practices being deployed successfully by the authorities which are the subject of this study.

Indeed, this view was shared by some of the individuals spoken to in the course of the research. The duty was described by one council as “the ideal tool to deliver on our priority for addressing inequalities” and by another as a “no-brainer” in “furthering the impact analysis of our budget decisions in the face of reducing resources”.

Just Fair is therefore encouraged in its opinion that section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 should be in force in all of the UK as it would contribute positively towards a reduction in the extent of disadvantage being experienced on the grounds of socio-economic inequality.

Finally, this study, which was necessarily limited in scope, has revealed the need for more in depth and extensive research of the work being done by local authorities to tackle socio-economic inequality and its effects. Not only would this offer greater evidence from which conclusions might be drawn, it could also encompass a broader set of actors, including civil society, and explore the intersection between socio-economic disadvantage and that which is based on protected characteristics. Furthermore, a more comprehensive investigation will provide an opportunity for informed and detailed guidance to be formulated for the benefit of local authorities. Notably, all the authorities who participated in this study expressed a desire that best practice gleaned from other authorities tackling socio-economic disadvantage be disseminated and opportunities for peer learning developed.
**Just Fair** works to realise a fairer and more just society in the UK by monitoring and advocating the protection of economic and social rights.

Just Fair is committed to increasing public awareness of international human rights law and the capability to use it. Just Fair is also devoted to the advancement of high-quality thinking, training and practice to ensure that economic and social rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

#1forEquality is a campaign led by **Just Fair** and **The Equality Trust**, and supported by many **groups and individuals**, to urge the UK Government to implement the Socio-Economic Duty by commencing Section 1 of the Equality Act. Find out more at [www.1forequality.com](http://www.1forequality.com).