

Child poverty and fuel poverty are above the national average in the North East. Inequality harms us all. It is bad for community **cohesion** and bad for the **economy**.

Inequality is not inevitable. It is a political **choice**. Rising inequality is a missed opportunity to end **poverty**.

Local authorities have a powerful tool at their disposal to build a **fair** society and reduce inequalities. They can implement best practices to bring the **socio-economic duty** to life.

## What is the Socio-Economic Duty?

Inequality harms physical and mental health, self-esteem, happiness, sense of trust and civic participation.

Inequality is both a cause and a result of human rights abuses.

The Equality Act 2010 contains a very valuable tool to achieve the necessary systemic change: the socio-economic duty.

The duty contained in [Section 1](#) would require public authorities to actively consider the way in which their decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage.

*We have lived through government policies that have a negative impact on our lives, now it is time for our voices to be heard and we are enabled to make positive steps to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. There is a need for the voice and lived experience to shape, design and implement policies so we are able to realise our full potential.*

Tracey Herrington,  
[Poverty2Solutions](#)

Successive governments have failed to commence the socio-economic duty, which means that public authorities are not technically bound by Section 1.

However, the duty is now in force in **Scotland** ('Fairer Scotland Duty'), **Wales**

is planning to implement it in 2019, and some local authorities in England are voluntarily implementing it as well.

Human rights bodies at the **United Nations**, [more than 70 local and national charities](#) and [82 MPs](#) from five different parties are calling on the UK Government to trigger the socio-economic duty.

## What does the Socio-Economic Duty look like in practice at the local level?

In 2018, Just Fair interviewed 20 council representatives, senior officers and voluntary sector groups in Manchester, Newcastle, Oldham, Wigan, Bristol, York

and the London Borough of Islington.

Just Fair's [research](#) shows that it is vital that someone senior, the leader, a committed councillor or an executive member of the local authority, champions the implementation of the

socio-economic duty, ideally with local cross-party support.

Transparent and open budgeting processes or the application of a real living wage are two expressions of the commitment of a local authority with the reduction of inequalities.

City of **York** Council created a financial inclusion steering group, which has executive member and senior officer engagement and allocates funds in crisis loans and financial inclusion initiatives.

Transparent data and public accountability are essential. In **Bristol**,

50 local indicators give an overall assessment of the well-being of citizens and communities in terms of sustainability, employment, overwork and deprivation.

*The experience of the United Kingdom, especially since 2010, underscores the conclusion that poverty is a political choice.*

Philip Alston, [UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights](#)

Local fairness commissions can make a big difference. The Fairness Commission in **Haringey (London)** is now considering urging the Borough Council to implement the socio-economic duty.

**Equality defines a fair society. It should not be a postcode lottery.**

The socio-economic duty offers a powerful lever to reduce the damaging gaps that harm us all.

**Be #1forEquality.** We invite you to join us in supporting the implementation of the socio-economic duty in your local authority and calling for the commencement of the socio-economic duty nationally.

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**Just Fair** works to realise a fairer and more just society in the UK by monitoring and advocating for the protection of economic and social rights.

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