



The socio-economic duty in action

Case studies from England and Wales

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The compounding effects of austerity, Covid-19, and the cost-of-living crisis have led to an increasing number of people in the UK experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

These socio-economic inequalities are persistent and create severe¹ financial hardship for the almost 22% of the UK population living in relative poverty. There is also a growing recognition that socio-economic disadvantage is not experienced in isolation – it intersects with, and compounds, other axes of inequality pertaining to disability, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, among others.

Despite the prevalence of socio-economic disadvantage, in England, a powerful tool available to public authorities to address socio-economic inequality, Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, the socio-economic duty, is not being fully utilised.

What is the socio-economic duty?

Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, the socio-economic duty ('the duty'), is intended to reduce socio-economic disadvantage.

If enacted, it requires local and public authorities to consider the ways in which their decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage, in much the same way as they are required to consider inequalities resulting from 'protected characteristics' such as gender or disability.

Equality Act 2010, Section 1(1) 'the duty'

An authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, 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.

Implementation in the UK

Despite the Equality Act being passed by the UK Parliament in 2010, successive UK Governments have not implemented the duty.

While in April 2018, Scotland brought the duty into force as the Fairer Scotland Duty, and in March 2021, Wales brought it into force under its A More Equal Wales policy agenda.

As such, public authorities in England are not bound to consider socio-economic disadvantage when making decisions.

¹ HBAI (2023) Households Below Average Income 2021/22: The Income Distribution Summary Tables. Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2022> [Accessed 10/05/2023]

Scotland

The Fairer Scotland Duty, which came into force in 2018, enacted the duty in Scotland. This places a duty on selected public bodies to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage and publish assessments providing evidence of this.

Wales

In 2021, the duty came into force in Wales as part of the Welsh Government's broader programme to help public bodies deliver 'A More Equal Wales'.

England

The duty has not yet been enacted in England but has been voluntarily adopted by many local authorities and public bodies. Greater Manchester Poverty Action found that in 2021, one in seven local councils had voluntarily adopted the duty, and over half of councils were 'acting in the spirit of the duty' by considering socio-economic status in equality impact assessments for strategic decision-making and policy development.²

Northern Ireland

The Equality Act 2010 does not apply to Northern Ireland. However, there are calls for a Single Equality Act in Northern Ireland which would build upon the Equality Act 2010.³

The purpose of this report

This report builds on previous work by Greater Manchester Poverty Action and Just Fair, notably 'A Practical Guide for Local Authority Implementation of the Socio-Economic Duty in England,' and complements this guidance by providing examples of successful implementation of the socio-economic duty. The report seeks to support local authorities and public bodies to voluntarily adopt the duty and expand the reach and impact of the duty for those who have already adopted it.

Drawing on the experiences of public bodies across the UK, this report presents a range of case studies to illustrate how the duty can improve decision-making and assist local authorities and public bodies in tackling socio-economic inequality. The case studies outline a number of ways in which the duty is being used to tackle inequality, including:

- attracting more applicants to jobs;
- easing the cost-of-living crisis;
- preventing increases in school meal prices;
- responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report includes case studies provided by local authorities and public authorities across England and Wales. Terms and information used in the case studies are used as per the case studies submitted, and not necessarily endorsed by Just Fair or GMPA. The term socio-economic duty ('the duty'), is capitalised by the Welsh Government as Socio-economic Duty.

² Greater Manchester Poverty Action (2022) Briefing on the current scale of the socio-economic duty in England. Greater Manchester Poverty Action. Available at: <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SED-findings-briefing-FINAL-DRAFT-002.pdf> [Accessed 10/05/2023]

³ See for example the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's 2022 position paper: <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/SingleEqualityAct-ECNI-PolicyPosition-2022.pdf>

Case studies

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Hackney

Hackney Council

While the UK Government failed to make the required 'commencement order' to bring the duty into effect in 2010, Hackney Council recognised that the duty was an integral part of a holistic approach to equality and therefore adopted the duty on a voluntary basis when the Equality Act came into force.

For over a decade, Hackney Council has recognised that socio-economic disadvantage is the key driver of inequality, while also recognising that people can be disadvantaged and discriminated against because of a protected characteristic, and that these may intersect.

Tackling poverty has been a political and corporate priority since 2018 for Hackney Council, alongside shaping a more inclusive economy. Despite visible affluence, the council estimates that a 1/3 of Hackney households and 1/2 of children are in poverty after housing costs, and that groups that experience structural inequality are more likely to be in poverty.

Hackney Council's planned and proactive approach to equality and cohesion is evident in their response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which they immediately recognised was not just about health but also about poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.

Community Partnerships Network: centring poverty and socio-economic disadvantage in the Covid-19 response

In early 2020, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Hackney Council identified the

potential impacts of lockdown and self-isolation on 'vulnerable' groups, including:

- people experiencing food poverty
- people who are unexpectedly laid off
- people with no recourse to public funds
- people experiencing homelessness.

During the first wave of Covid-19, the urgency of the situation demanded a direct approach to supporting these groups and Hackney Council, like other local authorities, delivered food parcels to 2000 households.

In July 2020, after the first wave, Hackney Council used the limited breathing room to conduct an equality review to inform the next phase of support, focusing on a wider group of residents in poverty. The equality review identified key inequalities stemming from socio-economic disadvantage during Covid-19, including:

- Digital exclusion due to limited access to hardware and broadband which impacted access to education, information and services, and online social networks.
- Overrepresentation of people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage within frontline workforces which also intersected with other axes of inequality, particularly race.
- People experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may be less likely to access council services and those most at risk may not be aware of the support available.

The equality review, with socio-economic disadvantage and its intersectional impacts

centred, led to the formation of the Community Partnerships Network (CPN) – a partnership between the local authority, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the community sector and local businesses which provided culturally inclusive support to 'vulnerable', shielding, and isolated residents during the pandemic.

The partnership engaged 60 private and voluntary sector members of the wider food partnership and 22 voluntary sector members working in six consortia to support people self-isolating and shielding.

The council also worked with Volunteer Centre Hackney to engage new volunteers. By working with partners, Hackney Council were able to improve their reach, offer support that was more specific to needs, get more added value (for instance through doorstep conversations and referrals for other support), and develop longer-term support.

As a result of this proactive approach which centred poverty and socio-economic inequality from the beginning of the pandemic, between October 2020 and July 2021, Hackney delivered a huge frontline response which included:

- 3000 meals per week and 2000 food parcels or grocery top-ups.
- 474 households were directly referred to the CPN for funded help with food and essentials – including just under 300 who were clinically vulnerable.
- Catering for a wide range of culturally specific, dietary, and allergy needs.
- 2500 volunteers were deployed.
- Over 600 welfare calls were made to shielders.
- Improving the way food surplus was brought into the borough and distributed, helping to set up 4 food hubs run by community partners, which also reduced food waste.
- Rather than tick-box processes of eligibility, Hackney Council had conversations to understand and prioritise need as well as detecting when someone is 'vulnerable' and needing to be referred to a relevant multidisciplinary team or support in the community.

This proactive approach has continued beyond the pandemic, with Hackney Council recognising that the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 are likely to be longer-term than the health crisis. The council is therefore facilitating the development of local networks between food, navigation, and advice partners as well as leading on longer-term solutions including food co-ops, community supermarkets, food growing, and cash-first approaches.

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After Covid-19

The commitment to the socio-economic duty has helped them to focus on the wider implications of poverty, including as the UK emerged from the pandemic. They recognised that many people would likely be in a worse financial position and they would need to ensure support was still in place. Collaboration continues to be at the heart of this approach.

Hackney adopted a Poverty Reduction Framework in March 2022. They note that the causes and effects of poverty are varied and complex and that no single service or organisation can tackle the scale of the challenge or reach the diversity of people struggling.

The Poverty Reduction Framework helps balance these different considerations. It identifies the importance of early years and advocates for an early help approach for all ages. It sets out how the council will work with partners to improve the crisis support and makes the connection between crisis support and early help, outlining the importance of learning for frontline workers. The external drivers of poverty are highlighted and it sets out what the council is doing to intervene, while being honest about the limitations.

Why adopt the duty?

Decision-making in crises such as Covid-19 is highly pressured due to time and resource constraints alongside significant uncertainty.

But by embedding the duty in a holistic approach to equality for over a decade, Hackney Council immediately recognised the unequal impacts of Covid-19 on people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and other marginalised communities and had a planned and proactive response to equality and cohesion from the beginning of the crisis.

Having the duty as part of their wider considerations also helped Hackney Council prepare to undertake work as the UK

emerged from the pandemic, understanding that many might be in a worse financial position, and that no single service or organisation could tackle the scale of the challenge or reach the diversity of people struggling - and so a clear and joined-up approach was needed.

"When the Equality Act came into force in 2010, the council was very disappointed that socio-economically disadvantaged groups were not adopted as a protected group, as had been proposed. We therefore voluntarily adopted socio-economically disadvantaged groups as a protected characteristic. By doing so we have been able to look at needs in the round since then. This was embedded into objectives in 2013, 2018 and will again be part of new objectives to be adopted later in 2023.

Those who have been discriminated against or disadvantaged because of a protected characteristic are more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged as well, as a result of discrimination and / or disadvantage. So it really does not make sense to exclude consideration of socio-economic status and disadvantage if we want to tackle key inequalities."

Councillor Carole Williams - Hackney Council

Harborough

Harborough Council

Harborough District Council has used the duty to embed considerations of socio-economic disadvantage into their decision-making since 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the intersecting nature of inequalities into sharp relief - highlighting the extent to which socio-economic disadvantage could be a consequence of, and perpetuate, poor physical and mental health. The pandemic therefore highlighted the value of including the duty as part of a holistic approach to decision-making in the face of crises. Harborough District Council carried this learning through to the cost-of-living crisis, considering the mental health risks associated with socio-economic disadvantage, financial hardship, and debt.

During the cost-of-living crisis, Harborough District Council was acutely aware of the potential negative impact that debt could have on mental health, particularly for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage and those who had not previously experienced debt or been in contact with support services in the past. Harborough District Council sought to pre-empt the risks to mental health associated with debt and financial hardship by developing a set of resources to support people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, often for the first time.

Financial first aid

In collaboration with Home-Start South Leicestershire and the Harborough branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Harborough

District Council developed a 'Financial First Aid Toolkit' to offer advice and support for people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage or financial hardship, with a particular focus on reducing negative health outcomes brought on by the crisis. The 'Financial First Aid Toolkit' included a briefing to frontline workers which helped signpost people to support services and local charities, as well as an online cost-of-living crisis hub which brought together free resources for financial support, details of partner agencies and local charities offering grants and funding to create a network of support for local residents.

Why adopt the duty?

As seen in Hackney, the duty is particularly valuable as a way of embedding equality into decision-making during a crisis when resources are often stretched, and decisions need to be made quickly. In Harborough, the cost-of-living crisis exposed some people to deprivation for the first time, and the duty supported the council to pre-empt the unequal effects of the crisis.

“It has highlighted the need for socio-economic considerations to be on the agenda ... when looking at equality impact assessments and inequalities... there are cumulative impacts”

– Harborough District Council

Merseyside

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) adopted the duty in 2021 as part of the MFRS equality analysis process, and in May 2023 formally agreed to report on the duty annually, highlighting key activity across the Merseyside region.

The duty has supported MFRS in developing a holistic approach to addressing the inequalities of outcome that stem from socio-economic disadvantage which builds on existing good practice whilst also highlighting new areas of focus. This has included:

- introducing driving licence bursaries for applicants from deprived areas of Merseyside
- continuing to concentrate prevention resources on high-risk areas through Safe & Well Visits
- creating a socio-economic disadvantage staff support network
- developing stronger links and more robust data-sharing practices with key partners
- engaging in new research projects.

Driving licence bursary scheme

Following the adoption of the duty, MFRS reviewed their recruitment practices and identified that individuals experiencing socio-economic disadvantage were underrepresented in firefighter applications. Drawing on UK Government data which indicated that women, people from ethnic minority groups, and people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were less likely to have driving licences, MFRS realised that the driving license requirement for firefighter roles was a

presenting a barrier to prospective applicants.

MFRS therefore removed the driving licence requirement for prospective firefighters and now offers driving licence bursaries for successful applicants from 20 deprived areas of Merseyside, with driving lessons offered in MFRS' training school, and MFRS paying the cost of driving tests and licence fees. This has led to an additional 195 applications in 2022, 48 per cent of which came from the 10 per cent most deprived areas of Merseyside.

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“It tackles three areas – the people least likely to have a driving license are people who come from socio-economically deprived areas, women and people from ethnic minorities”

– Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Alongside reducing the inequalities of outcome that stem from socio-economic disadvantage, the driving licence bursary also makes firefighter roles more accessible, particularly to women and people from ethnic minorities who may be less likely to have a licence. For MFRS, the adoption of the duty has complemented and strengthened existing equality commitments.

Safe & Well Visits

Recognising that socio-economic disadvantage often intersects with other axes of inequality, MFRS conduct Safe & Well Visits in deprived areas of Merseyside and for individuals who have been identified as high-risk.

Safe & Well Visits are conducted by a specialist team of prevention advocates who complete a Home Fire Risk Assessment, alongside falls risk, fuel poverty assessments, alcohol and smoking reduction advice, and help and guidance with loneliness and isolation. Previously, Safe & Well Visits have also focused on public health priorities including delivering kits for bowel cancer screening and supporting 'healthy hearts' by taking people's blood pressure.

Safe & Well Visits therefore offer a holistic approach to tackling the inequalities of outcome that result from socio-economic disadvantage – seeking not only to reduce inequalities of fire risk, but also inequalities of health and isolation.

Adopting the duty has supported MFRS' work in this area by facilitating more robust data-sharing and links with key partners to identify the ways in which socio-economic disadvantage intersects with other axes of inequality. This allows MFRS to use their unique position in communities to enable 60,000 home visits per year to further multiple interrelated equality objectives.

Socio-economic disadvantage staff support network

MFRS have around 1000 staff members and have developed a series of internal networks

to support people within the organisation, including an LGBTQ+ staff network, neurodiversity staff network, wellbeing network, gender network and a minority ethnicity staff network.

Following the adoption of the duty, MFRS have also created a socio-economic disadvantage staff support network which seeks to bring together employees from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Not only does this network support existing staff members, but it provides a forum for furthering the reach of the duty within and beyond the organisation. This network is chaired by a staff member and aligned to a Strategic Leadership Team member as a senior sponsor.

Partnerships and research

The adoption of the duty has facilitated stronger links between MFRS and other organisations seeking to reduce inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage. This includes MFRS' involvement in a new three-year research project titled 'Fire safety and energy poverty: Tackling a hidden injustice', a research project delivered in collaboration with the University of Manchester and Antwerp Regional Fire Service which seeks to investigate the relationship between domestic fire safety and fuel poverty.

In addition, over the last 12 months, MFRS has worked closely with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, the 6 local authorities within it, Merseyside Police and Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership to work collaboratively to consider how to maximise the positive impacts adoption of the duty can deliver.

MFRS are therefore working with partners focusing on three thematic areas to operationalise the duty:

1. As an employer

Collectively MFRS provides tens of thousands of jobs in the city region. By reviewing their employment policies, practices, and procedures through the lens of socio-economic disadvantage they can continue to ensure that they are in the best position to attract, retain, and provide opportunities for their most disadvantaged residents.

2. As service providers and commissioners

There are people who engage with MFRS services, or who could benefit from their services, who face socio-economic disadvantage. It is important that they continue to consider the potential impacts on these people (positive or negative) as they change existing services or develop new ones. Additionally, their organisations have significant spending power. In operationalising the duty through progressive procurement practices, they can reduce inequality of outcomes.

3. As civic leaders

Many of the causes of socio-economic disadvantage are deep-rooted and structural. Developing a collective lobbying campaign with partners can help to keep these issues high on the agenda for current and future governments. MFRS believe they can also use their convening powers to support other organisations to take positive steps towards addressing socio-economic disadvantage.

Why adopt the duty?

MFRS has always sought to act in the spirit of the duty, committing prevention resources, both in isolation and in collaboration with partners, to high-risk, deprived areas and exemplified fair and inclusive recruitment practices as a major employer in the region. Despite this long-term ethos, as the above case study emphasises, formally adopting the duty has brought several benefits which build on MFRS' existing good practice.

“It makes people think a bit more ... it changes the focus in the way managers within the organisation actually look at how they deliver their services, how we manage our people, and how we recruit our people ”

– Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Adopting the duty is a key element of MFRS' ambition to tackle the inequality that puts the most vulnerable at risk, and Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, is leading at a regional level on embedding the duty in decision-making and annual reporting in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority area.

To conclude, the duty is seen as an essential tool that can be used to help reduce inequality of outcomes. MFRS remains committed towards working with partners to ensure the organisation's decision-making processes take full account of socio-economic disadvantage and subsequently identify potential ways to reduce it.

North of Tyne

North of Tyne Combined Authority

In June 2020, North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) implemented the duty through their updated Equality and Diversity Policy, making them the first combined authority in England to do so. Following the adoption of the Duty, NTCA substantially revised its recruitment policy to reduce the inequalities of outcome in employment that stem from socio-economic disadvantage.

This has included:

- Providing internal training for staff to ensure that person specifications in job adverts do not demand higher-level qualifications than necessary.
- Prioritising and embedding equalities statements in job adverts.
- Encouraging individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in junior roles to apply for more senior positions.

Person specifications

After adopting the duty, NTCA realised that many person specifications had been asking for high-level qualifications or skills at all levels of employment, even if this was not strictly necessary for the role. This was discouraging individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to apply, in part because individuals who experience socio-economic disadvantage are less likely to have a degree.

NTCA has therefore reviewed the way that person specifications in job adverts are written and have removed the requirement for a degree from as many roles as possible. If degree-level experience is required, NTCA

also welcome 'equivalent experience' as an alternative. While this good practice is now relatively widespread across a range of public and private sector organisations, at NTCA this is a rule which is embedded in their recruitment practices.

Internal training

This shift in recruitment practices has been supported by internal coaching for NTCA staff to be clear about the demands of roles which are being recruited for. Staff are now better able to identify the qualifications and skills which are necessary for the role, and those which are not, thus creating more accurate job adverts which do not demand higher-level qualifications and skills than necessary. This has encouraged more applications from individuals experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Prioritising equality

Many job adverts include a relatively standard equalities statement about being an equal opportunities employer at the end of the advert. However, NTCA has prioritised equality in recruitment, ensuring that their equalities statement is a central element of the advert. This emphasises NTCA's enthusiasm to employ people from diverse backgrounds and highlights that diversity strengthens their team.

NTCA has received feedback from applicants from diverse backgrounds, including those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, that this active prioritisation of equality has

made the roles more attractive and encouraged individuals to apply. As a result, there are now more employees from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds working at NTCA.

Most recently, NTCA has been honoured with the 'Great Place to Work' award. 100% of staff who took part⁵ in a survey reported that they believe they are treated fairly - regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

Internal advertising

Through the review of its recruitment practices, NTCA identified that some junior staff members who have experienced socio-economic disadvantage had assumed that they would not be eligible for promotions to more senior roles in the organisation. In collaboration with trade unions, NTCA introduced more internal advertising for senior roles to provide opportunities for staff from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply.

In one case, a long-term employee from a socio-economically disadvantaged background, who did not have a degree or thinks themselves capable of promotion, was encouraged to apply for a senior role. The employee was successful in this application and has been excelling in the role since.

Encouraging applications to senior roles

NTCA have found that individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to apply for senior roles in the belief that they are not sufficiently qualified, despite being good candidates for the role.

Therefore, alongside supporting staff members from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply for senior roles, NTCA now ask applicants for junior roles if they would be willing to be considered for senior roles for which there are also vacancies.

This has led to an increase in applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds applying for senior roles - several candidates have been successful and now work at NTCA.

Why adopt the duty?

Applying the duty to recruitment, NTCA recognised that their previous recruitment practices were discouraging potential applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds from applying.

By using the duty to review and mitigate these practices, NTCA has embedded equality into recruitment and has a more diverse team as a result.

This will support NTCA to further embed equality within its organisation and across the North of Tyne.

“The duty complements our other equalities work... if you are seeking to employ people in your organisation with a different view of the world and a different lens, then the duty is key”

- North of Tyne Combined Authority

⁵ 86% of staff took part in the survey

Salford

Salford City Council

Salford City Council committed to adopting the duty in 2021, as part of their refreshed Tackling Poverty Strategy, although they had previously been working in the spirit of the duty for some time. This commitment was followed by training for both officers and political members of the council in how to best utilise the duty.

A toolkit was developed and the council undertook a 'soft launch' period to smooth the implementation of the duty. The duty has supported Salford City Council to evidence the consideration of socio-economic disadvantage, as well as to embed this throughout the process of policy development.

The following example, which details Salford City Council's process when considering a raise in the price of school meals, shows the practical impact of the duty.

School meals price freeze

In 2022, faced with rising food and labour costs, Salford City Council proposed raising the price of school meals provided by the citywide school caterer by £0.10 per meal, to £2.20 for primary school pupils. Within the design of the policy were a number of measures intended to mitigate the impact on low-income families who didn't qualify for free school meals.

These measures included informing headteachers of the proposed changes 5 months in advance and communicating to schools all available mechanisms by which families struggling to afford school meals

could be supported. The council also consulted with headteachers and committed to further consultation with headteachers and the wider school community if prices were increased further.

In addition to this, the council planned to undertake a 12-month period of evaluation to examine whether the price increase has resulted in fewer pupils accessing school meals and/or an increase in pupil lunch debt.

The council then considered the evidence gathered in relation to the potential impacts of the policy on socio-economically disadvantaged families. Despite the mitigations included in the original policy, the council concluded that the wider context of the cost-of-living crisis meant that the policy could still be detrimental to some low-income families.

As a result, any rise in school meal prices was paused to avoid further disadvantaging some low-income families, and this policy will now be reviewed in September 2023.

Why adopt the duty?

In Salford, the duty supports an extended process of policy consideration, mitigation, evidence gathering and evaluation.

These processes enable the council to robustly examine proposed policies to ensure they don't exacerbate existing inequalities and, in some cases, change or delay them to ensure residents are supported through difficult times.

Greater Manchester

Transport for Greater Manchester

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) formally adopted the duty in August 2022, during a period in which they were also refreshing their inclusion and equalities strategy.

This decision brought them in line with five local authorities in Greater Manchester, which have all adopted, or are in the process of adopting, the duty. Formal adoption of the duty by TfGM took place comparatively recently, but socio-economic disadvantage has been considered in its equality impact assessments for some time.

Although there is some continuity in the move from informal to formal adoption of the duty, formal adoption has lent greater focus to TfGM's pre-existing efforts to reduce socio-economic disadvantage in Greater Manchester and encouraged proactive consultation with people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage.

Engagement with people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

Since the adoption of the duty, TfGM has worked to embed the voices of people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage into strategy design. They are in the process of engaging with a poverty reference group on a new customer charter, a collection of commitments which underpins Greater Manchester's new integrated transport network, the Bee Network.

This group will be engaged alongside other lived experience groups that work with TfGM.

The focus on socio-economic disadvantage has also extended directly to other reference groups. TfGM will actively consider socio-economic disadvantage alongside other characteristics when selecting new members for the refreshed Disability Design Reference Group. Intersectionality around protected characteristic groups is key to delivering an inclusive and accessible transport system for the people of Greater Manchester.

An anti-poverty ecosystem

Although the increased emphasis on socio-economic disadvantage is in part fuelled by the adoption of the duty, the above changes are also linked to wider changes in the anti-poverty landscape across Greater Manchester.

The poverty reference group members who will be engaged on TfGM's customer charter were recruited through their involvement with the Trafford Poverty Truth Commission, one of five Poverty Truth Commissions to have taken place across Greater Manchester since 2016. Previously, TfGM lacked access to such a group for engagement purposes.

It is this change in the anti-poverty environment in Greater Manchester, alongside a renewed commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage, that has enabled TfGM to respond to the adoption of the duty by widening engagement to include people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Similarly, the adoption of the duty at TfGM is part of a wider move towards voluntary adoption of the duty across the city region.

Lisa Williams, Strategic Lead for Consultations and Inclusion, described adoption of the duty as "the direction of travel for Greater Manchester", highlighting how the adoption of the duty by one or more statutory authorities can support a mutually reinforcing anti-poverty ecosystem.

Why adopt the duty?

Despite TfGM's prior emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility, which included considering socio-economic disadvantage in equality impact assessments, formal adoption of the duty has further increased the focus on this work.

In addition, it has formed part of the creation of a wider environment across Greater Manchester in which organisations work to reduce socio-economic deprivation and resources and best practice is shared across the city region.

Here it is clear that the duty can be an valuable tool in shaping an organisation internally, and projecting a focus on tackling socio-economic disadvantage in the wider community.

Wales

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government enacted the duty in 2021, as part of a wider commitment to create A More Equal Wales⁶. All public bodies, including Welsh Ministers, are now required, when making decisions of a strategic nature, to have due regard to the need to reduce the inequality of outcome that results from socio-economic disadvantage. The impact of the duty has been particularly visible in centring considerations of socio-economic disadvantage during Covid-19 and in the changing healthcare landscape. In particular:

- The Vaccination Transformation Programme aims to ensure equitable vaccine uptake across communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- The Covid-19 Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement Scheme considered the low pay of care workers when designing a support package during the pandemic.
- The 'A Healthier Wales' plan has established a specific NHS Health Inequalities Group.

Vaccination Transformation Programme

Consideration of the duty was a central element of the Vaccination Transformation Programme in 2022. The Welsh Government recognised that equitable uptake of vaccination is needed across societies in Wales so that individuals, families, and communities are protected from the harms of vaccine-preventable disease. Reducing the inequities in access to key preventative healthcare was therefore central to the

Welsh Government's design of their future strategy for vaccination in a post-Covid-19 context.

The Vaccination Transformation Programme was co-produced with key stakeholders. Task and finish groups supported the design and development phases of the programme – one of which was focused on inclusion and engagement, with a particular focus on vaccine equity. Equity was a design principle of the programme, embedded in all workstreams.

The resulting National Immunisation Framework⁷ (NIF), published in October 2022, requires all Health Boards in Wales to prepare a Vaccine Equity Strategy. These strategies, which consider socio-economic disadvantage alongside protected characteristics and under-served groups, will be supported by a programme of work to address inequitable vaccine uptake, including by socio-economic status.

The national Vaccination Equity Strategy⁸ for Wales also sets out to reduce low uptake among deprived communities by a variety of means, including improving accessibility and affordability by creating local vaccination hubs on well-travelled transport routes.

By using the duty and co-production in designing the NIF, the Welsh Government has developed a framework directly contributing to reducing the inequalities of outcome in health and access to healthcare that result from socio-economic disadvantage.

⁶ A More Equal Wales: The Socio-economic Duty, available here: <https://www.gov.wales/more-equal-wales-socio-economic-duty>.

⁷ National Immunisation Framework for Wales (2022), available here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-10/national-immunisation-framework-for-wales.pdf>

⁸ COVID-19 Vaccination Equity Strategy for Wales, available here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/covid-19-vaccination-equity-strategy-wales.pdf>

Covid-19 Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement Scheme

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many social care workers had to stay off work due to actual or potential exposure to Covid-19, particularly due to the increased vulnerability of those to which they provide care. The Welsh Government consulted widely to develop a scheme supporting social care workers and completed an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), which included the duty. The IIA raised the following points:

- The majority of social care workers – including care workers in adult and children’s homes, domiciliary care and supported housing workers, and Personal Assistants – experience considerable socio-economic disadvantage.⁹
- Most social care workers are employed in the private sector and are paid minimum wage or close to minimum wage.
- Most social care workers do not receive occupational sick pay.
- At times, expectations on social care workers to stay away from work due to Covid-19 were higher than for employees in other sectors, due to the increased vulnerability of those they cared for.
- The majority of the social care workforce are women.

The IIA confirmed that without a scheme for social workers, a low paid section of the workforce would be placed at a greater socio-economic disadvantage due to loss of earnings, and that this inequality would intersect with gender inequality.

The Welsh Government therefore launched the Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement scheme to provide financial support to social care workers when they were required to stay off work due to actual or potential exposure to Covid-19. The scheme ensured that staff staying off work continued to receive their full pay, without delay.

The scheme provided £10m to social care workers over a period of 22 months, supporting an estimated 18,000 full time equivalent care workers. Given the high proportion of part time workers in the social care workforce, it is likely the scheme supported more individual workers than this.

£10 million to social care workers over a period of 22 months, supporting 18,000 full time equivalent care workers

The scheme also contributed to longer-term changes in social care through the Social Care Fair Work Forum which was established in September 2020 to improve the working conditions of the social care workforce. This included the potential for occupational sick pay, the Real Living Wage, and the introduction of a pay and progression framework.

⁹ The Real Living Wage was introduced for social care workers in April 2022. Even with this positive development, social care workers remain relatively poorly paid, compared to many other employment sectors.

A Healthier Wales

In 2018, the Welsh Government's A Healthier Wales,¹⁰ aimed to develop a seamless local health and social care model focussed on health and wellbeing, prevention, and accessibility. A transformation programme, comprising twenty six actions centred around four strategic visions, supports A Healthier Wales in developing a new model of care.

Integral to this model of care is the reduction of health inequities, which is included as one of the four strategic visions in the transformation programme. In addition, one of the twenty six actions is given over to tackling inequalities, although this goal has also been embedded across the programme in a whole systems approach.

A new NHS Health Inequalities Group has been established to maximise the contribution of the NHS to tackling health inequalities. It will focus on service planning and delivery and be an example for the wider public sector.

Why adopt the duty?

The duty embeds equality into decision-making across Wales. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the duty played a key role in ensuring that social care workers were financially supported throughout the pandemic. The duty provides an increasingly important and powerful tool to tackle socio-economic disadvantage across Wales.

“By requiring relevant public bodies to make better decisions, ones which place consideration of inequalities of outcomes arising from socio-economic disadvantage at their heart, the socio-economic duty will help us to move towards reconstruction of a fairer and more prosperous Wales.

Statutory guidance, an animation film, lived experience films, webinar recordings, and an online training resource have been developed to support implementation of the Duty. A dedicated website page has been developed to host this information.

The Welsh Government continues to consider the impact of the socio-economic duty as it develops supporting interventions designed to improve the quality of life and opportunities for all of the people of Wales.”

- Welsh Government

¹⁰ A healthier Wales: long term plan for health and social care, 2018, available here: <https://www.gov.wales/healthier-wales-long-term-plan-health-and-social-care>

Conclusion

Across the wide range of public bodies included in this report, all with varied resident demographics and political landscapes, the benefits of adopting the duty remained consistent. These organisations have emphasised the positive impact of the duty on their work and local communities, stating that it enhances existing efforts to address socio-economic disadvantage and promotes collaborative approaches.

Increased focus

One advantage of the duty is the increased focus it brings to tackling socio-economic disadvantage, including for organisations which have already incorporated socio-economic measures into their equality impact assessments. At MFRS, it led to the removal of the driving licence requirement for applicants, improving workforce diversity, while in Wales, the emphasis on socio-economic disadvantage ensured support for social care workers during the pandemic.

A collaborative approach

Another benefit of the duty is its promotion of a collaborative approach to tackling socio-economic disadvantage.

In Wales, the national enacting of the duty facilitated a multi-pronged approach to addressing vaccination uptake inequity, with collaboration between the Welsh Government and local Health Boards. The patchy voluntary adoption of the duty across England limits opportunities for collaboration, but TfGM's case study still demonstrates how adopting it can support a local anti-poverty ecosystem, enabling impactful work across a region.

Addressing intersecting inequalities

Socio-economic disadvantage intersects with, and is compounded by, other axes of inequality, potentially relating to other protected characteristics, meaning efforts to tackle socio-economic disadvantage can also reduce other inequalities.

For instance, the introduction of a driving licence bursary in Merseyside benefited women and people of colour, who are disproportionately less likely to hold driving licences. Similarly, the support provided to care workers during the pandemic improved both socio-economic and gender equality. Here it is clear that implementing the duty not only helps tackle socio-economic inequality, but also supports wider efforts to address inequality on the basis of protected characteristics.

The value of adopting the duty

The duty is a valuable tool for integrating efforts to tackle socio-economic disadvantage within statutory bodies.

Its adoption increases the focus on addressing socio-economic disadvantage and fosters the creation of a broader anti-poverty ecosystem. The intersecting nature of inequalities means that the implementation of the duty can also support efforts to reduce inequalities on the basis of other protected characteristics. The duty does not constrict the organisations that implement it, but instead opens up new ways to tackle socio-economic disadvantage, through strategic engagement, health policies, unemployment initiatives and hiring and promotion practices.

Further reading

Further information about the socio-economic duty

Briefing on the current scale of the socio-economic duty in England (GMPA, 2022)

Short briefing on the scale of voluntary socio-economic duty adoption as of 2021. Available here: <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SED-findings-briefing-FINAL-DRAFT-002.pdf>

Tackling inequality: the Socio-economic Duty (Just Fair, 2022)

Short briefing offering the social and legal case for implementing the socio-economic duty. Available here: <https://justfair.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UPR-Briefing-1-1.pdf>

Fairer Scotland Duty: guidance for public bodies (Scottish Government, 2022)

Guidance from the Scottish Government on the Fairer Scotland Duty. The resources section includes five additional case studies illustrating how the socio-economic duty can be used in practice. Available here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-duty-guidance-public-bodies/documents/>

A More Equal Wales (Welsh Government, 2021)

Statutory Guidance from the Welsh Government on the socio-economic duty. Available here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/a-more-equal-wales.pdf>

Evaluating the socio-economic duty in Scotland and Wales (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021)

Research into how 24 public bodies in Scotland and Wales are implementing, or preparing to implement, the socio-economic duty. Available here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/evaluating-socio-economic-duty-scotland-and-wales>

How to implement the socio-economic duty

Maximising opportunities for health and wellbeing for people and communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Public Health Wales, 2023)

Practical guide to using the socio-economic duty in policy and practice in Wales. Available here: https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/PHW-SED-Guidance-Eng-06_06_23-5.pdf

A Practical Guide for Local Authority Implementation of the Socio-Economic Duty in England (GMPA and Just Fair, 2021)

Publication detailing key steps to ensure meaningful implementation of the socio-economic duty. Available here: <https://justfair.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Socio-Economic-Duty-Guide-Final.pdf>

Socioeconomic duty toolkit (Revolving Doors Agency and New Generation Policing, 2021)

A toolkit on how the socio-economic duty can be used to challenge poverty in policing. Available here: <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/1359-Socioeconomic-Duty-Toolkit-FINAL-3.pdf>

Tackling socio-economic inequalities locally (Just Fair, 2018)

Compilation of best practice guidance for implementing the socio-economic duty in England. Available here: <https://justfair.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Just-Fair-June2018-Tackling-socio-economic-inequalities-locally.pdf>

Further resources

A More Equal Wales The Socio-economic Duty Equality Act 2010 (Welsh Government, 2020)

Examples of inequalities of outcome due to socio-economic disadvantage and COVID-19. Available here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/1/3/1610565121/more-equal-wales-socio-economic-duty.pdf>

SED Tool - School Meal Price Increase (Salford City Council, 2022)

Template for a socio-economic duty assessment created by Salford City Council. Available here: <https://sccdemocracy.salford.gov.uk/documents/s54171/SED%20Tool%20-%20School%20Meal%20Price%20Increase%20-%20Final.pdf#:~:text=The%20Salford%20Socio-Economic%20Duty%20Framework%20sets%20standards%20for,reducing%20inequalities%20of%20outcome%20resulting%20from%20socio-economic%20disadvantage.>