

Glasgow Centre for Population Health response to the Scottish Government consultation on socioeconomic duty

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the socioeconomic duty. The GCPH was established in 2004 to generate insights and evidence and inform and influence action to improve health and tackle inequality. The Centre offers an authoritative voice in policy and practice domains that impact on the health and wellbeing of the population in and around Glasgow, and on inequalities in health. It is widely understood that socioeconomic factors and the physical environment are fundamental causes of health inequalities^{1,2,3}.

It is in the context of these impacts on health brought about by social, economic and environmental policies that we are responding to this consultation.

Section 1 - Defining the Key Terms of the Duty

1. Do you agree that the definitions of these terms are reasonable and should be included within the Scottish Government's forthcoming guidance on the socioeconomic duty?

The key terms defined in this section are:

- Socioeconomic disadvantage
- Inequalities of outcome
- Decisions of a strategic nature
- Due regard

Yes No

Comments:

The definitions of 'socioeconomic disadvantage' and 'inequalities of outcome' are appropriate. However, we do not agree that this is the case with 'decisions of a strategic nature' and 'due regard'.

Decisions of a strategic nature: The areas where public authorities should explicitly consider their socioeconomic responsibilities could be expanded to include any plans or strategic frameworks that could potentially have an impact on people experiencing poverty.

Due regard: We believe that the definition of 'due regard' is one that is unlikely to result in a comprehensive application of the socioeconomic duty by public bodies: a much clearer, more specific and less vague articulation of the precise policy areas where the duty needs to be taken into account is required. The ideal would be one in which the reduction of inequalities becomes part and parcel of all policies that could potentially impact the population in socioeconomic terms. In terms of strategic investments specifically, the socioeconomic duty absolutely needs to be taken into account.

Overall, thought should be given to how public bodies can build capacity within their organisations in terms of increasing their understanding of poverty, inequalities and human

rights. The Fairer Scotland Action Plan recommends that to ensure that public service delivery is respectful, person-centred and preserves the dignity of all people, pre-employment and in-service training should include the importance of avoiding stigma and developing understanding of the challenges of living on a very low income⁴. We endorse this and suggest it should become routine for all staff in public bodies to receive regular training on inequalities and their impacts on citizens.

A useful resource is a comprehensive policy review of health inequalities, carried out in 2013, which suggests actions that are more likely to be effective in addressing the fundamental causes of inequalities. It argues that inequalities account for a significant element of the increasing demands on our public services because of a persisting cycle of deprivation and low aspiration and around 40% of our spending is currently accounted for by interventions that could have been avoided by prioritising a preventative approach⁵.

We would also recommend making links at local level with public or third sector organisations that can advise on these issues, with a view to setting up a steering group to ensure that the socioeconomic duty is fully understood by policy- and decision-makers.

[Section 2 – The Public Authorities covered by the Duty](#)

2A. Do you agree that the socioeconomic duty should apply to the Scottish public authorities named here?

- Scottish Ministers [see below]
- Local Authorities
- NHS Health Scotland
- Integration Joint Boards
- Regional Health Boards
- The Scottish Police Authority
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Scottish Enterprise

“Scottish Ministers” covers the following: The Scottish Government, Accountant in Bankruptcy; Disclosure Scotland; Education Scotland; Scottish Prison Service; Scottish Public Pensions Agency; Student Awards Agency for Scotland; Transport Scotland. The new Scottish Social Security Agency, once established, will also be subject to the duty.

Yes No

If not, please specify which authority you do not think it should apply to and why?

We would question the reason for such a selective list and believe that it should be expanded, as per our response to question 2B.

2B. Do you think the duty should apply to any other public authorities, similar to those listed in the Equality Act 2010?

The list of public authorities in the Act

- a Minister of the Crown;
- a government department other than the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service or the Government Communications Head-quarters;
- a county council or district council in England;
- the Greater London Authority;
- a London borough council;
- the Common Council of the City of London in its capacity as a local authority;
- the Council of the Isles of Scilly;
- a Strategic Health Authority established under section 13 of the National Health Service Act 2006, or continued in existence by virtue of that section;
- a Primary Care Trust established under section 18 of that Act, or continued in existence by virtue of that section;
- a regional development agency established by the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998
- A police authority established for an area in England.

Yes No

If so, please name them and explain why you think the duty should apply.

In terms of the list of public authorities covered by the socioeconomic duty, we believe the duty should apply to all local authorities and public bodies, as listed on the SG website <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/public-bodies/about/Bodies>, as well as quangos. Some current obvious omissions include NHS Scotland, special health boards, universities and colleges, the fire service, SEPA, among others. Any exceptions should be made explicit and explained. The Fairer Scotland Action Plan proposes that “the public sector is key to delivering a fairer Scotland and this new duty will help make sure that the sector takes full account of poverty and disadvantage when key decisions are being made”. Indeed, if all of the commitments in the Fairer Scotland Action Plan are to be realised, we believe the best way to achieve this is by putting the socioeconomic duty into statute. It is also important to clarify the relevance of the duty with regard to devolved duties, if there is a potential wider impact on the devolved population. For example, can this duty be applied to UK agencies (e.g. DWP) that operate in Scotland?

Section 3 - Meeting the Requirements of the Duty

3A. Do you have any comments on the steps set out in SECTION 3?

3B. What other actions could public authorities take to demonstrate that they are meeting the duty?

3C. Could you offer suggestions as to how public authorities could improve budgetary analysis and reporting so as to take better account of inequalities related to socioeconomic disadvantage?

3D. Can you offer examples of how public authorities and others have made best use of the expertise of people with direct experience of poverty?

3E. What kind of guidance and support on meeting the duty would be most useful for public authorities?

3F. Do you have a view on whether public authorities should use existing monitoring frameworks to track whether the socioeconomic duty is making a difference to outcomes over the long term?

3A. We agree that, as outlined in Step 2, public authorities need to be aware of the potential inequalities that should be addressed during strategic planning frameworks/decision-making. As an example, some of these may include local authority Single Outcome Agreements, and integrated joint boards' Children's Services Plans.

It will be important to incorporate an evidence-gathering role at this key stage in strategic planning to ensure that those ultimately responsible for adopting plans will have awareness of the expectations in terms of meeting the socioeconomic duty.

3B. *Demonstrating that they are meeting the duty.* If no existing framework is in place for monitoring how public authorities are adhering to the duty and the impacts on inequalities of actions taken, a new body needs to be established. Additionally, more clarity is needed on how authorities will assess the evidence (and what evidence is used) to demonstrate they are meeting the duty.

As stated, we believe that, for the Scottish Government to succeed in ensuring that no public policies or decisions impact negatively on disadvantaged areas or groups, then legislation is needed.

3D. Some examples of ways in which public bodies avail of the expertise of people with direct experience of poverty include:

- The Scottish Poverty Truth Commission brings together some of Scotland's key decision-makers with those living in poverty to ensure that the voices of those with first-hand experience of poverty are heard and taken into account (<http://povertytruthcommission.blogspot.co.uk/>)

- The Glasgow city Poverty Leadership Panel is a multi-disciplinary panel to co-ordinate action on poverty in the city (<http://povertyleadershippanel.org.uk/actionplan>). The associated action plan, renamed the People Make Glasgow Fairer Strategy, involves citizens with first-hand experience of living in poverty on a Community Activist Panel (CAP), who play a role in the production and decision-making processes of new services, and attend and participate in the PLP meetings, which are co-chaired by a CAP member along with the Council Leader.
- Renfrewshire Council's Tackling Poverty Commission was set up to assess the nature, causes and impact of child poverty in Renfrewshire, and make recommendations for the introduction of a strategic approach for the Community Planning Partnership (<http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/tacklingpoverty>). It includes action to narrow inequalities by "working in a way which is inclusive, effective and evidence-based" through involving people living in poverty in co-production and peer support. The recommendations, designed to be delivered in partnership, are outlined in the Tackling Poverty Programme (TPC) which was developed to deliver the Tackling Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. The TPC stretches across all the services within Renfrewshire Council.
- The Poverty Alliance carries out a range of community engagement activities with deprived communities and individuals to ensure they have their voices heard by policy-makers and service providers (http://www.povertyalliance.org/what_we_do/communities)

3E. As highlighted in Section 1, we suggest that 'due regard' needs to be clarified with regard to the precise policy areas where it should be taken into account.

We also suggest that public bodies identify sources of information and training on inequalities to build a clearer understanding of the need for adopting the socioeconomic duty and to ensure decision-makers are educated about the reasons for the existence of socioeconomic inequalities, conditions that can exacerbate and alleviate them, and the longer term outcomes that might arise for someone experiencing the lived realities of inequality. This could be through face-to-face awareness-raising sessions, in some cases in collaboration with local public or third sector sources such as the local Health and Social Care Partnerships, public health organisations or poverty groups. Alternatively, through web-based resources and written materials, for example, NHS Health Scotland has published an informative 'Inequality briefing' on the causes and nature of health inequalities and how to reduce them⁶ and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published a local government briefing on health inequalities and population health⁷. This includes information on the benefits to local authorities of tackling health inequalities and a range of support tools for planning, review and scrutiny.

3F. Regarding the use of existing monitoring frameworks to track the success of the socioeconomic duty, we would suggest that more are needed, for example, monitoring frameworks don't currently exist for transport and infrastructure policy and it will be important that the monitoring framework for the City Deals in Scotland incorporates relevant aspects of inclusion, socioeconomic circumstances and inequalities.

In addition, existing monitoring frameworks do not by and large track the impacts of policies on inequalities or clearly monitor relevant measures of inequality to enable a clear understanding of whether inequalities are narrowing, widening or changing. In introducing the socioeconomic duty, it would make sense to also introduce a requirement for all public bodies to regularly (perhaps annually) report on and describe trends in inequalities pertinent

to the issues dealt with and services they provide. Included in such reporting would be a description of how they are operating and providing services in ways that are designed to reduce inequality. It would also be appropriate for such reports to note existing inequalities and policies over which they have no control but which could impact on inequalities in the sector they work in e.g. taxation, welfare, minimum wage levels, etc. In this way, public bodies can provide evidence that 'due regard' has been given to inequalities of outcome when making decisions of a strategic nature. If public bodies currently have mechanisms in place to record how they make strategic decisions, then the burden of demonstrating due regard to the socioeconomic duty should not be too onerous.

Consistency of reporting formats and content would be important but such a monitoring framework should allow some flexibility to allow locally relevant issues to be exposed e.g. access to services in remote and rural areas, transport costs, etc. All reporting should be provided in an accessible format on an open access basis.

Section 4 - Links between this and other Duties

4A. Once the socioeconomic duty is introduced, the Scottish Government is keen for public authorities to look strategically across all planning processes in place to maximise their impact.

What could public authorities and the Scottish Government do to make sure that the links between the different duties are managed effectively within organisations?

We agree that a strategic co-ordinated approach to planning is necessary to ensure complementarity and connectivity of decision-making. Additionally, public bodies should undertake a monitoring and reporting role to evidence this.

- Reporting to an independent agency which would oversee and monitor actions could help to ensure that links are made across a range of strategies/decisions, for example the new Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission or Oxfam.
- In general, it would be useful for the Scottish Government to compare what is being suggested in the socioeconomic duty with poverty-proofing campaigns being championed by organisations such as Oxfam Scotland (<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/>) and the Poverty Alliance (http://www.povertyalliance.org/policy_campaigns).

4B. Can you offer examples of good practice in taking an integrated approach to issues such as poverty, equality, and human rights?

Health inequalities arise from inequalities within and between societies and are determined by social and economic conditions and their effects on people's lives, as well as demographic change, climate change, urbanisation and globalisation⁸.

The World Health Organization (WHO) framework for ensuring action on inequalities, Health in All Policies, is an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health

impacts in order to improve population health and health equity⁹. 'Health in all policies' suggests approaches to integrate action on poverty, inequality and human rights across all areas of public policy, such as:

- Commit to health and health equity as a political priority by adopting the principles of Health in All Policies and taking action on the social determinants of health.
- Ensure effective structures, processes and resources that enable implementation of the Health in All Policies approach across governments at all levels and between governments.
- Strengthen the capacity of Ministries of Health to engage other sectors of government through leadership, partnership, advocacy and mediation to achieve improved health outcomes.
- Build institutional capacity and skills that enable the implementation of Health in All Policies and provide evidence on the determinants of health and inequity and on effective responses.
- Adopt transparent audit and accountability mechanisms for health and equity impacts that build trust across government and between governments and their people.
- Establish conflict of interest measures that include effective safeguards to protect policies from distortion by commercial and vested interests and influence.
- Include communities, social movements and civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of Health in All Policies, building health literacy in the population.

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