

The Future of Fairness Commissions: Briefing Note for Roundtable Discussion

Fairness Commissions - Background

1. Over the past six years many local areas across the UK have established 'Fairness Commissions' to examine and develop policy recommendations designed to tackle the impact of poverty and inequality at a local level.
2. The first Commission was established in Islington in 2010. Approximately 30 Commissions have since been set up across England, Scotland and Wales. While there has been some variation between different Commissions in their focus or scope – at times reflected in different names such as Poverty, Inequality or Social Inclusion Commissions – all have taken their starting point a conviction that ever-widening inequality is neither natural nor intractable.
3. A full list of Commissions is attached as an Appendix to this Briefing Note.
4. The Commissions have generally operated by bringing together a cross-sectoral group of senior local representatives. Sometimes the Commissions have been augmented by relevant national organisations or policy organisations and academics with a specific expertise. The purpose has been to hear detailed evidence on particular issues and produce recommendations for change. They gather data and testimony from community stakeholders and citizens to increase understanding of poverty and inequality in their locality, and seek to develop a vision of what a fairer society might look and feel like for its residents.
5. The majority of Commissions have been instigated and supported by local authorities, while the Commissioners themselves usually reflect a balance of public, private, third sector and community interests.
6. Separate research studies by the [Webb Memorial Trust](#) and the [New Economics Foundation \(NEF\)](#) have examined Fairness Commissions as an approach for reducing poverty and inequality in the UK. Both reports concluded that Fairness Commissions have been very successful in gathering evidence about poverty and inequality at a local level, but it has not yet been possible to measure what practical impact they have had on helping to reduce its prevalence.
7. The Carnegie UK Trust has convened a roundtable discussion to provide an opportunity for stakeholders from across the UK to reflect upon, understand and learn from the experiences of the different Commissions. Participants include key leaders from individual Fairness Commissions as well as policy stakeholders operating at a national level.
8. Below we set out some topics for discussion that we believe it will be useful for the roundtable to consider – although clearly the precise focus and topics of discussion will be shaped by participants.

Issues for discussion

9. The scope of the issues examined by the Commissions has been vast, encompassing cost of living; housing; access to jobs, education and training; childcare; digital connectivity; infrastructure; access to services and social security, and health and social care. The roundtable will explore common themes that have been central to the work of Commissions across the UK. It will consider the different approaches that Commissions have taken to achieving a coherent narrative across these diverse, complex policy areas.
10. All Commissions have sought to address the tension between developing policy recommendations which can be enacted at a local level, and seeking to influence national policy to take action where it is deemed that this is where change is most required. Some Commissions deliberately restrict the scope of their inquiry to what can be done locally, so as to avoid generating a ‘wish list’ of policies which may not be achieved. Other Commissions ascribe local action where practicable but also made recommendations to national government of how they should prioritise resources to combat poverty and inequality. The roundtable will consider how different Commissions approached this challenge and the effectiveness of different approaches.
11. While all Commissions have programmed some direct outreach and engagement with individual citizens into their evidence-taking process, the breadth and depth of this engagement inevitably varied quite considerably between different Commissions. It has been rare for private individuals to serve as Commissioners. The roundtable will consider different approaches that Commissions have taken to citizen engagement. It will look at how the right balance might be achieved between securing expert input from Commissioners and stakeholders with influence and expertise and ensuring there is wider purchase among community groups and citizens who might support meaningful public participation and engagement beyond the immediate duration of the Commission.
12. To date it has been difficult to measure the impact of Commissions as a broad phenomenon, not least because all have taken different approaches to implementation and are at different stages in their development. It is also not always clear what role Commissions might play in the implementation of their recommendations and what the legacy activity of the Commission should be once it has published its report. The roundtable will consider what an ongoing role for a Commission might be once it has concluded its work and different models that might be deployed to enable an appropriate degree of ongoing engagement.
13. By bringing together representatives from different Fairness Commissions, we believe the roundtable also presents an opportunity to explore how further collaboration between Fairness Commissions might be achieved, in order to secure greater impact, influence and leverage at both regional and national level.

Appendix 1: List of Fairness Commissions in the UK

1. Birmingham Social Inclusion Process
2. Blackpool Fairness Commission
3. Brighton & Hove Fairness Commission
4. Bristol Fairness Commission
5. Camden Equality Taskforce
6. Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission
7. Dundee Fairness Commission
8. East Lothian Poverty Commission
9. Greater Manchester Poverty Commission
10. Greenwich Fairness Commission
11. Islington Fairness Commission
12. Lancashire Fairness Commission
13. Liverpool Fairness Commission
14. London Fairness Commission
15. Newport Fairness Commission
16. North Ayrshire Fair for All Commission
17. North Lanarkshire Fairness Commission
18. Newcastle Fairness Commission
19. Oldham Fairness Commission
20. Perth and Kinross Fairness Commission
21. Plymouth Fairness Commission
22. Redbridge Fairness Commission
23. Renfrewshire Tackling Poverty Commission
24. Sheffield Fairness Commission
25. Shetland Tackling Inequalities Commission
26. Southampton Fairness Commission
27. Thurrock Fairness Commission
28. Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission
29. Wakefield Poverty and Prosperity Commission
30. York Fairness Commission

Appendix 2: List of attending Fairness Commissions

1. Camden Inequality Taskforce
2. Fairer Fife Commission
3. Islington Fairness Commission
4. London Fairness Commission
5. Newcastle Fairness Commission
6. Newport Fairness Commission
7. North Ayrshire Fair for All Commission
8. North Lanarkshire Fairness Commission
9. Perth and Kinross Fairness Commission
10. Redbridge Fairness Commission
11. Sheffield Fairness Commission
12. Shetland Tackling Inequalities Commission
13. Southampton Fairness Commission
14. Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission
15. York Fairness Commission