

Two Islingtons: understanding the problem

Overview and strategy paper

1. Social inequality, justice and mobility continue to be at the heart of the public policy debate and approaches to improving the lives of residents in the London Borough of Islington.

"...there is a clear case for ongoing efforts to secure equality of opportunity. [R]esearch shows that absolute poverty and the size of the gap between the richest and poorest people reduces productivity and requires vast amounts of public money to be spent in dealing with the effects in relation to issues such as unemployment and crime. Real and perceived inequality reduces social cohesion, increasing the occurrence of violence, conflict and insecurity. Tackling economic polarisation is our greatest challenge as we strive to create a cohesive society that meets the needs of our diverse community."

pg 4, Corporate Equality Scheme and Community Cohesion Strategy 2008

2. In *the Spirit Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett provide evidence that more equal societies deliver better outcomes across almost all indicators of fairness and quality of life. For example, people living in more equal societies live longer, healthier lives and children have a greater sense of wellbeing.
3. Despite the pockets of affluence for which it is known, Islington is the eighth most deprived local authority in England. This is recognised in the way in which Islington is funded by Central Government. 42.3% of Islington's funding (£123.3 million) is directly or indirectly linked to deprivation. This is significantly higher per head of the population than the national average.

4. This paper provides an overview of the key issues for fairness and equality in Islington, and draws together key conclusions from the other more detailed papers which are included in this set. The other papers are:
- Paper i. What is the picture for Islington?
Understanding the evidence base
- Paper ii. What do we already do in Islington?
A summary of key strategies in Islington
- Paper iii. What do other people think and do about fairness and equality?
A summary of key analysis and practice from external sources
5. Of itself, the evidence does not provide the Commission with the answers on how to address fairness and equality in Islington, nor does it suggest appropriate policy responses. The aim of this paper is to help the Islington Fairness Commission:
- agree a shared sense of what the key issues and problems are on the ground; and,
 - frame the key lines of inquiry for its further work.

Fairness and Equality in Islington

- *Owner-occupiers in Islington earn an average gross annual income of £50,000; Islington Council tenants earn an average of £6,000.*
- *Around 50% of Islington Households live in social housing – nearly twice the average for London Boroughs.*
- *Older people from black and minority ethnic groups are far more likely to experience problems claiming benefits than White British people – only 11% of black and ethnic minority groups have not had problems compared with 42% of White British people.*
- *If you are Bangladeshi you are nine times more likely to have never worked than if you are white British.*
- *White British boys are the largest single group of people currently not in education, employment or training.*
- *95% of young people not in education, training or employment are from workless families.*
- *45% of children in Islington live in poverty (18,000 children) which is the second highest rate in the country.*
- *Over 20% of the school population are estimated to be from refugee backgrounds.*
- *Children & young people in Islington are 36% more likely than counterparts in London / England to experience mental health problems.*
- *65 % of older people feel “unsafe” in their neighbourhoods after dark.*

- *Young people are the main victims of crime.*
- *If you are disabled you are 8x more likely to be a victim of sex abuse.*
- *66% of gay men have been victims of homophobic crime.*

Key Facts on Fairness and Equality

Key Actions in Islington

6. Lots has been done by a range of service providers to improve fairness and equality in Islington over the last few years and key successes include progress in the following areas:

Improving life expectancy and quality of life

7. Last year Islington had more people quit smoking than anywhere else in London. This is a real success as smoking is the single most preventable cause of ill health and early death in Islington. There was targeted work through NHS Stop Smoking Clinics including work with groups where smoking prevalence is higher e.g. Somali, Turkish.

Improving Educational attainment

8. Over the past 5 years Islington has improved attainment for its young people, narrowing the gap between itself, London and England. There have been particular successes with underachieving black and minority ethnic groups. Some groups such as African Caribbean boys now exceed the national average attainment level at GCSE.

Cutting Crime

9. The number of crimes, including youth crime, in Islington has fallen for four years in a row. With, for example, gang prevention work showing real results through changing management and accountability structures.

Improving the stock and flow of housing

10. Residential property has been built in Islington at a faster rate than in many other London Boroughs and Islington is on track to meet the national Decent Homes Standard by 2011. There has been good progress in reducing severe overcrowding – but the problems in Islington have been very substantial so there is more to do.

Improving the environment and tackling fuel poverty

11. Improved energy efficiency has helped reduce carbon emissions and reduce energy costs - particularly for the poor, old people and the disabled. 180 organisations have joined Climate Change Partnership each with targets to reduce their carbon emissions.

Environmental cleanliness is high and Islington has achieved green flag status for many of its public spaces as well as a green flag for its work on climate change.

Key Issues on Fairness and Equality

12. Despite some successes, the stark statistics point to the fact that there is more to do on equality and fairness in Islington:

Nearly half of Islington's children live in poverty, and almost all are in workless families

13. Of the 40,000 children and young people in the borough 45% live in poverty. This equates to 18,000 children and is the second highest rate in the country. Of these, 73% live in lone parent households. Only one in seven is in a low income working household. Child poverty in Islington is overwhelmingly a phenomenon associated with worklessness.
14. Data on earned income suggests that in Islington the gross full-time earnings of the lowest earners is £351 per week compared to gross earnings of £1,127 of the top 20% of earners. In other words the higher earners are paid nearly four times as much as the lower earners.

The picture on skills and employment is varied

15. There are 140,000 people in Islington of working age. Two thirds of them are in employment. The number of people who are in work has fallen over the last year and is lower than the London average despite there being 1.3 jobs located in the borough for each resident of working age.
16. Islington has a relatively skilled workforce with a higher than average number of people qualified to degree level or the equivalent (47%), but 18,000 residents of working age have no qualifications at all and a further 13,000 have fewer than five GCSE passes. Four hundred 16 to 18 year olds are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and 95% of these live in families where nobody works.

There are big differences in life expectancy depending on where in the borough you live

17. Deprivation and health inequalities are inextricably linked, and deprivation stands out as the main risk factor for early death and poor health in Islington. Deprivation and poverty are directly correlated with unhealthy lifestyle behaviours. The major lifestyle factors that contribute to early deaths in Islington are smoking, poor diet, low levels of physical activity, poor mental health, alcohol and substance misuse, teenage pregnancy and sexual health. Geography matters too. Between 2003 and 2007 Clerkenwell had the highest life expectancy for men (77.8 years) and Tollington had the lowest (72.6 years) – a difference of over 5 years. For women, St George's ward had the highest life expectancy (82.5 years) and Finsbury Park had the lowest (78.1 years).

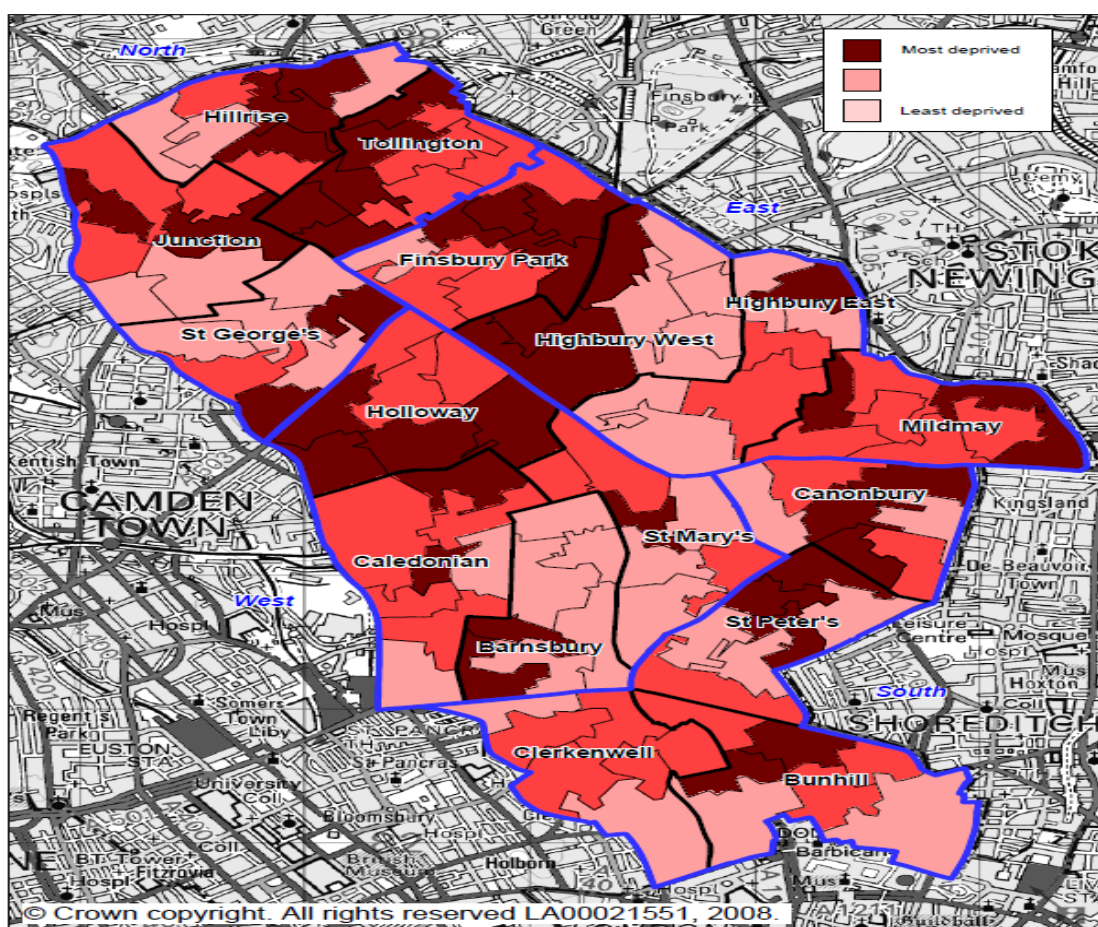
Pupils from poorer families perform less well at school than those from wealthier homes

18. Only 73% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved level 4 in mathematics at Key Stage 2 compared to 83% of pupils who were not eligible for FSM – a gap of ten percentage points. In English the gap was 14 points and in science nine points. The picture is repeated at GCSE level, though the gaps are not quite so marked. Of pupils

eligible for FSM, 63% got five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to 67% of those not eligible for FSM

The rates and types of crime vary considerably across the borough

19. Islington has one of the highest rates of reported crime in the country. In the last 12 months there were just over 28,000 reported crimes in the borough. Crime – and the fear of crime - is not uniformly distributed throughout the borough. Violence against the person is most prevalent in Finsbury Park and St Mary's both of which are over 60% higher than the Islington average. Robbery is a much less common offence but again is most common in Finsbury Park, followed by Junction and Mildmay (Figure 24). Clerkenwell, Bunhill and Finsbury Park are the wards with the highest rates of burglary. The wards with the lowest level of crime overall are Highbury East, Highbury West and Hillrise.
20. Overall there are real differences between the borough in terms of overall deprivation:



21. Moreover, the way in which data and information are collected across Islington may mean that some of the impacts of inequality are hidden. Data and information is not collected or presented on a consistent basis so it is hard to compare different data sets across services and partners in Islington or to get a true picture of the totality of the Islington experience. There are likely to be some significant fairness and equalities issues that we are not able to identify.
22. There are also some areas where there are currently no reliable sources of data. For example for most services it is difficult to quantify how much money is allocated to

address deprivation over and above core-services. Understanding this information can be crucial for ensuring that the limited resources of the Council are targeted where they can make greatest impact on the lives of residents, and put less effort into interventions have less impact - this is particularly important in light of a much tighter budget in future.

23. Understanding the impact of deprivation funding in key area can be powerful. For example, for education we know that of the £130 million allocated to schools annually in Islington, £39 million is allocated on the basis of deprivation and equality indicators. Free school meals eligibility ranges from 8.9% in Yerbury primary school to 83.7% in Duncombe primary school. At key stage 2 the attainment of Islington pupils eligible for free school meals is about 10 percentage points worse than those not eligible. Although, the gap in Islington is not as wide as the average across the country, it is still worth considering whether a different approach to targeting resources might narrow the gap.

Personal Experiences

24. Behind the story told by the statistics there are some very real personal experiences. Here are some of the quotes that have been identified from work with residents, including through "customer journeys" about their experiences of using services in Islington and from other sources. This is just a small selection of some resident's experience of fairness and equality. There are many more voices and experiences.

"Poverty feels like a barrier between you and normal society. There is a very different mix of people in Islington, still very much the rich and poor. Different classes do not mix. It all damages your confidence".

"Quite a nice area; nice people, nice food and people are nice to one another. I feel comfortable living in Islington. Sometimes men [from my own community] give me problems".

"I live on an estate which is full of bottles and cigarette ends, it gets so dirty but the council don't clean it often. People come in and urinate everywhere...the council could put cameras and have a penalty for not looking after the estate...there is so much destruction, breaking telephone boxes, bus stops"

"Services are atrocious. They knock you when you are down. You get no respect. You feel as though you must have done something wrong to be in such a place".

"I am a lone parent, on £190 a week, but I am still struggling. I am desperate to work, but because of hospital appointments, jobs are not available."

"We were told that our flat is not overcrowded - my [disabled] son can sleep in the kitchen!"

"Yes they are underestimating our ability. I can do maths; it's English I have trouble with!"

"I left [school] after a few months. Teachers' expectations for me were low, just because I come from Africa they don't have high expectation for me"

"I don't like not having a home. If I had a magic suitcase I'd bring my family, my dad, my mum, my brother, my sister because we always play games like pillow

fighters"

Some quotes from residents on experiences of Fairness and Equality

What do other people think and do about fairness and equality issues?

25. There are lessons that can be learnt from some of the key ways that grassroots practitioners, local authorities, think tanks, academics and others have approached similar fairness and equality issues to the ones that Islington faces. There is a very wide range of emphasis in terms of subject matters and themes, for example some focus on improving educational attainment, some focus on family based interventions and others focus on developing civic society.

26. Even where energy is focused in the same area the range of approaches is huge - for example is it better to intervene in a child's early years or at secondary school?

27. Its unlikely that there is a single right way to approach any of the issues but examining ideas from outside Islington can help the Commission establish the right level of ambition for the Borough and how to frame its further work.

Key Issues for The Islington Fairness Commission

28. The following questions may help the Commission decide how to shape its future work programme and decide what it should do next.

How should we approach the problem?

- Should the Commission seek deeper inquiry into why some areas (for example Finsbury Park) continue to lag behind on all measures of deprivation, while other areas of the borough have progressed or continue to thrive?
- Why do some social groups appear to have a better experience of fairness and equality in Islington than other groups? Is this true only in Islington or more widely? Do we care?

What do we need to do now to make sure Islington is in a good position to take the best decisions for residents and to ensure that budget cuts are fair?

- How should we improve our understanding of the evidence? For example how should the commission tackle information gaps across practice in Islington?
- How will we identify the nature and scale of gaps in provision?
- How can we make sure we know what really works in Islington and what works less well.

What can we do to help the Islington Fairness Commission move forward?

- Do the Commissioners recognise the picture of Islington described?
- Can they add further richness to this analysis from their own experiences?
- What skills, perspectives and resources can Commissioners offer to help move the work of the Commission forward.