

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The State of Economic Justice in Birmingham and the Black Country 2021

(Extract taken from the New Policy Institute website)

This is the New Policy Institute's second report on Economic Justice in Birmingham and the Black Country, funded and published by the Barrow Cadbury Trust. The question that a report on economic justice tries to answer is how fairly an economy generates and distributes its rewards.

This report builds on the inequalities highlighted by the first, back in 2019, looking at the gap between how well the economy is working overall and how well it is working for residents. Having this double focus is essential, since it makes it clear that policymakers are not just assuming that the economic benefits will somehow 'trickle down' to local residents.

Like its predecessor, this report is concerned about the distribution of assets and people's opportunity to benefit from them. 'Assets' are not just financial ones and property, but also 'human' assets such as skills, and 'social assets', including the provision of social resources and services, such as childcare, good-quality housing and community amenities.

This report was written during the COVID-19 pandemic. While much of the data that has been used in the report pre-dates the pandemic, more recent data has been used where available.

The main findings of each chapter of the report are:

- **Population and public health:** the diverse health needs of the population in Birmingham and the Black Country highlight the reasons for pursuing economic justice beyond narrow economic ones. This is not just about how well the economy is doing in general, but also about who gets the benefits and how fairly they are spread.
- **Household and community resources:** going into the recession provoked by the pandemic, many households in Birmingham and the Black Country were already in a financially precarious position and, in the months to come, the social security system is not a guaranteed safety net for all those in need of it.
- **Productivity and jobs:** Birmingham and the Black Country had a chronic problem of too few jobs and an under-qualified workforce even before the pandemic. While the recession is exacerbating this, the need to respond to the COVID-19 crisis (plus responding to zero carbon economy) represents an opportunity to get to grips with the problem in the longer term too.
- **Employment, pay and job security:** the recession is hitting Birmingham and the Black Country's already weak employment position hard and that at least some of the local areas where the threat is greatest are not those where the employment picture was weakest going into the recession.
- **Housing:** there is a shortage of housing in Birmingham as well as high levels of fuel poverty across the whole area, due to both poor quality housing and low household incomes. Both Birmingham and the Black Country have a problem of housing unaffordability. It will take sustained and substantial increases in the resources available to local authorities for to be able to provide quality, affordable housing to those who need it.

Levels of deprivation across Birmingham and the Black Country are the highest in England for an area of this size. Over recent years, this disadvantage has, at least in relative terms, worsened, and it is not spread evenly, with some populations faring much worse than others. The deep and chronic disadvantage described in this report can, however, be alleviated if those with their hands on the economic levers – national, regional and local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and large employers – explicitly address the question of how economic benefits are distributed.

The [full report](#) is available from the Barrow Cadbury Trust website.

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#### About this report

This report was funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust and written by the New Policy Institute. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Barrow Cadbury Trust.