

The Socio-Economic Duty

A Consultation – Easy-read version

July 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government is going to ask councils and other public bodies to do more to tackle poverty and inequality in their local areas.

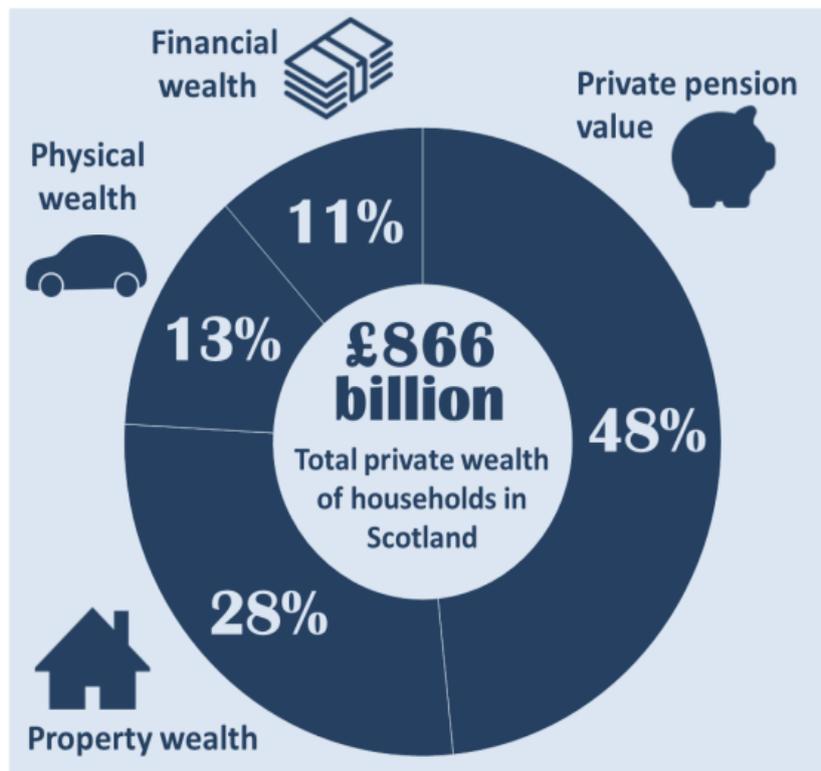
To do this, we're introducing a new 'socio-economic duty'. This means that important public bodies – like local councils and your local NHS – will have to think carefully about how to reduce poverty and inequality whenever they make the big decisions that are important to all of us.

We need your help to make sure the duty works well in practice – and there are some questions at the end so you can tell us what you think.

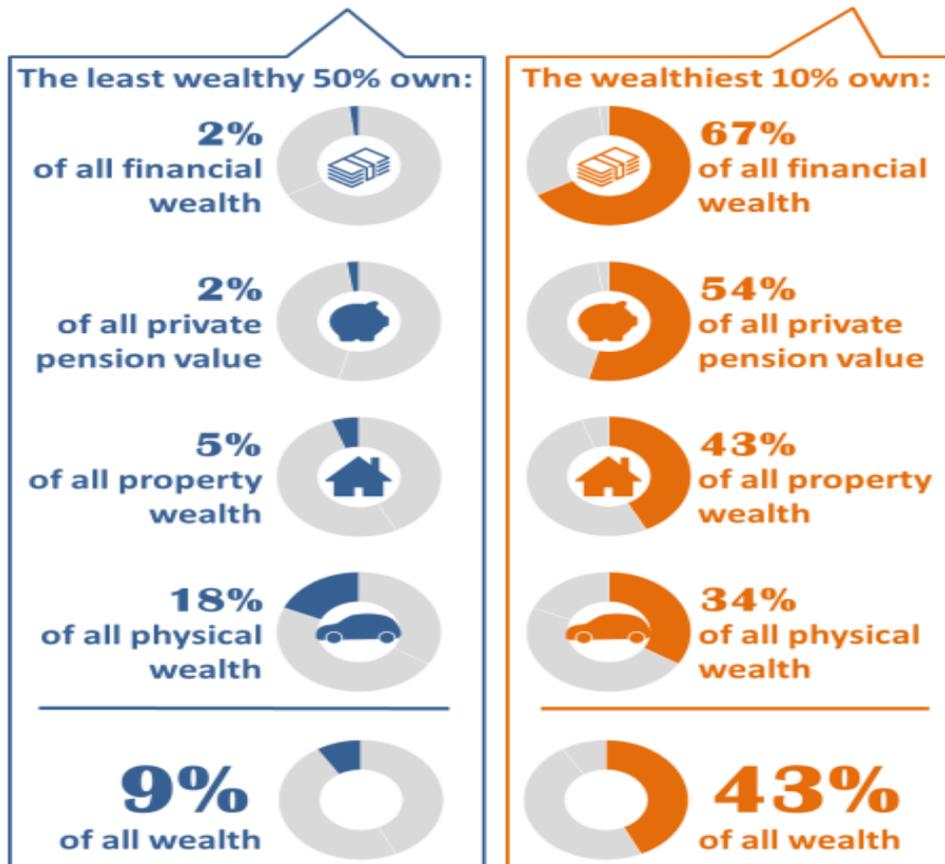
WHY DOES THIS MATTER

Scotland is a wealthy country but we know that the wealth in our country is not shared fairly – as you can see in the pictures below and over the page. We know that people living in worse off neighbourhoods are less likely to live long, healthy lives than people in better off neighbourhoods. We also know that children in poverty can find it difficult to get good qualifications from school. Poor qualifications mean it can be hard to get a good job to guarantee a lifetime away from poverty.

Scotland is a wealthy country.



But not everybody has an equal share.



Many of our public services in Scotland already do great work to tackle poverty and inequality. But with one in four children now living in poverty, it's clear that we all need to do more.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL THE NEW DUTY MAKE?

The new duty means that important public bodies - like local councils and the NHS - will have to think about how they can tackle poverty and inequality whenever they make the big decisions that are important to all of us.

In particular, the duty asks that they think about how to make the best decisions possible so they have the best chance of tackling poverty and inequality.

And this is important. It's usually when the big decisions are being made that we can make the biggest difference.

Let's look at an example to show the difference the duty could make.

BEFORE the Socio-Economic duty

A local council is putting together a new plan for low-cost housing. There are two possible sites. The council chooses this one:

* A greenfield site at the far east end of the council area, where it is relatively cheap to lay new pipes and to build houses with gardens which people have said they wanted. This is good as there is a shortage of affordable homes.

* But there are very few bus services, which could make it harder for people to get to work. And there are no plans to build services people need like local shops or a GP practice.

AFTER the Socio-Economic duty

The plan for new housing is an important decision. This means that the council has to think carefully about how the new housing plan will affect poverty and inequality, because the new duty is now in place.

The business plan still considers building new housing at the far east end of the council area, where it is cheaper and easier. They can build houses there too, rather than flats.

But the plan now says that if there is new housing, there will need to be new bus services and shops and other local services. It provides information on these services and the cost of setting them up.

The plan also has another idea - to build low cost flats in an empty site nearer to the centre of the council area instead. The building work will cost more per home. But it would be easier for people living there to get to work and to use the local services that are already there. Some money would still need to be spent on local services and a play area for children.

The local authority doesn't know which idea is best, so it asks local people, including those with experience of poverty.

Local people want the council to build in the centre of the council area because they think it will make it easier to get a job or change jobs.

The local authority thinks carefully about all this information, so that it can make the best decision for the area. It publishes a short report saying why it made that decision.

WHICH PUBLIC BODIES ARE GOING TO BE COVERED BY THE NEW DUTY?

Our plan is that the public bodies in the box below will be covered by the duty. These are the big strategic bodies that we think can make the biggest difference to poverty and inequality in Scotland.

Public bodies covered by the duty

Scottish Ministers – this includes:

The Scottish Government, Accountant in Bankruptcy; Disclosure Scotland; Education Scotland; Scottish Prison Service; Scottish Public Pensions Agency; Student Awards Agency for Scotland; Transport Scotland. It will also cover the new Social Security Agency once it is set up.

Local councils

NHS Health Scotland

Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards

Regional Health Boards

The Scottish Police Authority

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Scottish Enterprise

WHICH DECISIONS ARE THE BIG DECISIONS?

Below are some examples of the sorts of areas where public bodies are making big decisions and where we would expect the duty to have an influence. In some cases, a big decision may not involve a lot of money but it will make a big impact on the community. This might mean new plans for:

- housing in a local area
- helping to grow the local economy and create new jobs
- spending large sums of money on building things like new roads and hospitals
- a community woodland
- helping prevent crime
- transport in the region

HOW WILL WE KNOW THAT PUBLIC BODIES ARE TAKING THE DUTY SERIOUSLY?

We are writing a guide just now to help make sure public bodies take the duty seriously. This could include these actions:

Tell us how you've thought about impacts – public bodies will be asked to write down the impacts of any big decision they're making on poverty and inequality.

When they publish information about the decision they've made, we'll ask them to include information about these impacts too.

Tell us how you've thought about inequality when making big decisions about spending – Public bodies' spending plans are very important for tackling poverty and inequality. The Scottish Government already publishes a report looking at how decisions taken on spending affects different groups. But we could do more and we will. We'll also encourage other public bodies to be clear about their spending decisions.

Set up a Fairness Commission. Some local areas have set up Fairness Commissions – groups of people at local level who make suggestions to councils and other bodies about what they can do to tackle poverty better. We strongly support these commissions. These Fairness Commissions show a commitment to the duty and it would be great if all local areas across Scotland had one.

Involve people who have lived in poverty to make the big decisions. One obvious way to make sure big decisions take account of poverty and inequality is to listen to people who have experienced living in poverty themselves. There are already organisations – like the Poverty Truth Commission – that help people with real experience of poverty to make their voices heard. We want to see public bodies listening more to the voices of the people they serve.

YOU CAN HELP US MAKE SURE THE DUTY WORKS IN PRACTICE!

Tell us what you think.

Send us an email before 12th September, with a completed Respondent Information Form, at SEDConsultation@gov.scot – it's important to include the information form so we know who you are and if you're happy for us to publish your response.

You can just tell us your thoughts about what you've read here or you can answer these questions. It would be great to hear from you.

1. Is there anything you don't agree with in this paper? If there is, tell us about it.
2. Have we missed out any of the important public bodies – perhaps a public body that you've had dealings with?
3. What other actions could public bodies take to demonstrate that they are meeting the duty?
4. What else do we need to think about?

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!



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