

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - STORY

Name	John Cotton
Details, area of experience	Grew up in Birmingham. Became Labour councillor aged 25 in 1999. Since 2012 responsible for Social Inclusion, Community Safety and Equalities. Birmingham 'a tale of two cities'.
Interview date	November 2020
Issues addressed	Inequalities such as in-work poverty, building cohesion among communities. How can a local council improve people's lives.
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	Post World War II welfare state; 2008 (10+ years of austerity); 2012 (Lab. run Birmingham Council again); 2020 (Covid exacerbates inequalities)
Locations referenced	Birmingham
Campaigns, movements, protests	Real Living Wage, council now pays this to all employees. Council should be model employer. Those contracting for work with Birmingham Council also have to pay their staff RLW. Also encouraging other employers to do the same. Leading change to structural injustices within employment practices of council. Birmingham's Poverty Truth Commission, listening to those with lived experience of poverty.
Historical context	10 years of austerity since 2008 crash & Covid crisis.

Tactics	<p>Local councils can mitigate inequalities caused by govt policies. Council leading by example can impact poverty through local economy measures. Learning from volunteers, faith communities about direct action. Importance of partnership, allies and collaboration. Poverty Truth Commission.</p>
Key words	<p>Real Living Wage Structural inequality/injustice Speaking truth to power Collaboration Social cohesion</p>
Key points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involvement at an early age about issues you care about ● Our economic model, during last 10 years, has exacerbated injustice. Covid has further exposed this ● Birmingham - a tale of 2 cities; wealth and poverty ● Local councils have power to improve people's lives (e.g., Real Living Wage, tackling structural injustice) and can lead by example, encouraging others to do so too ● Importance of supporting communities to build cohesion together for a stronger society ● Establishing a forum for listening to those with lived experience of poverty/inequality in order to influence policies

Story summary	<p>As Labour councillor for Birmingham, John Cotton impacted local poverty by introducing to the Real Living Wage for all 17,000 council staff. Alongside the council, John also introduced the Rooney Rule, which changed recruitment practices to tackle inequality and support community cohesion, promoting a future committed to delivering justice.</p> <hr/> <p>As a young man growing up in Birmingham in Thatcher era (where economic injustice, racism and discrimination were rife), John was keen to change the inequality he saw in the city, i.e. thriving businesses alongside significant child poverty. He joined the Labour Party, became Labour councillor and when Labour took over the running of Birmingham again in 2020, John's area of responsibility became 'social and economic justice and exclusion.'</p> <p>As an employer, the council is looking at some structural injustices linked to race and gender within their workforce, believing that the council should lead by example in improving practices. As such they have introduced the Rooney Rule to change recruitment practices to tackle inequality.</p>
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	<p>There is a huge issue of in-work poverty with half of those below the poverty line in work. He believes that the local council could redress this and be a model for action. So, he introduced the Real Living Wage (RLW) for all council staff and 17,000 employees now paid RLW. Then, again the council leading by example, changed the arrangements for procuring contractors so if businesses want to do work for the council, they must pay their employees the RLW. Impacting poverty locally means more money circulating through local economy so everyone benefits. The Council also encourages others to pay RLW. During Covid crisis, they have learnt much from voluntary organisations, faith communities etc. about how partnership & collaboration improves people's lives.</p> <p>In addition, John's role is to build cohesion between communities. Birmingham has long history of people from the wider world making their home in the city. How can communities build and celebrate their future together? Schools are being encouraged to develop 'unheard' stories of diversity by working with local historians. A new development in Birmingham is creation of the Poverty Truth Commission, which facilitates people with lived experience of poverty to speak 'truth to power'. They will raise how policies affect their lives in order for local policies to be improved. John believes that there is a need to fix the economic model, so people have meaningful work, a sense of security & self-worth. This creates stronger communities in the future that are committed to delivering justice. It's a win-win.</p>
Stand-out quotations	<p>"It's really important that we, as an employer, lead by example."</p> <p>"The greatest weapon against prejudice and discrimination is conversation."</p> <p>"Break down barriers; that's how you build a stronger society."</p> <p>"Real Living Wage is not a magic bullet to fix economic justice in Birmingham, but a really important foundation stone."</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>Leading/Bringing about change by example</p> <p>Collaboration; councillors, vol. orgs, faith communities</p> <p>Importance of conversation in breaking down prejudice/discrimination. Challenging thinking.</p> <p>Different economic models</p> <p>Difference between local and national policies</p> <p>What is social cohesion?</p>