



**Craig Whittaker MP**

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## **Inequality: EDM 591 and the Socio-economic Duty**

Thank you for contacting me about the socio-economic duty on public bodies contained within section 1 of the Equality Act 2010.

As a Government Whip, I do not, by convention, sign any Early Day Motions, as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility, however, there are some points I would like to make.

I am proud that the UK Government's record on equalities is one of the best in the world and I know my colleagues in Government are determined this will remain so as, and after, we leave the EU.

There is already a Public Sector Equality Duty in place that requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act. Public sector bodies must also advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. However, I know the Government is reviewing the future of the un-commenced provisions in the Equality Act.

I am clear that social mobility has to be a top priority, and I am encouraged by my colleagues' commitment to this. I want this to be a country where every young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of their background, indeed, this has been a particular concern of mine throughout my time in politics.

I am pleased that real progress has been made in recent years. The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers has narrowed since the introduction of the pupil premium; the proportion of eligible disadvantaged two-year-olds benefiting from funded childcare has risen from 58 per cent in 2015 to 71 per cent in 2017; and more money than ever before is being invested in the early years.

There is, of course, still more to do and I am encouraged that the Department for Education recognises the need to focus on areas of the country with the greatest challenges and fewest opportunities. The Social Mobility Action Plan has been introduced to focus on places and communities across the county that have not yet seen the improvement that other parts of the country have benefited from. It includes key objectives such as boosting access to high quality early language and literacy, closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, creating world-class technical education to introduce real choice for young people post-16, and ensuring rewarding careers are a reality for all. £72 million is being invested in the 12 opportunity areas. As this gets into the full implementation stage, I am optimistic that we will see improvements in those areas and learn lessons that can be applied elsewhere around the country.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP