

# Breakthrough *Birmingham*

PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE  
BREAKTHROUGH BIRMINGHAM REPORT AND VISIT  
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## **BIRMINGHAM TOPS JOBLESS LEAGUE TABLE FOR CITIES**

**Former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith visits Birmingham on Thursday to study back to work programmes for the vulnerable**

Birmingham has the highest unemployment rate of England's provincial cities, according to a new study by the Centre for Social Justice chaired by the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith.

The CSJ survey "Breakthrough Birmingham" published tomorrow (Thurs) concludes that despite the city's success in attracting inward investment and creating jobs, a significant minority of its residents are subsisting on benefits.

Birmingham has nearly 180,000 people of working age who are economically inactive and for the last five years the number of working-age residents claiming a key benefit has been static at around 130,000. Birmingham is Britain's second biggest city and has a population of just over a million (1,006,500 in 2006).

Nearly one in three families are headed by a lone parent, 34 per cent higher than the national average of 22 per cent.

"National policy is failing to help people make the transition from welfare to work, trapping some of the most vulnerable people in society on benefits," Mr Duncan Smith says in a foreword to the report.

"The Government's flagship welfare-to-work programmes – the New Deal – are ineffective.

"In 2001, 3880 people in Birmingham gained jobs through the New Deal for Young People. In 2006, just 2405 found work."

Mr Duncan Smith will visit two voluntary sector projects in Birmingham on Thursday December 6 formally to launch the Breakthrough Birmingham report and to learn more about how they are helping long-term jobless young people and drug and alcohol abusers to find work. (See separate Operational Note for more details).

Birmingham's unemployment rate is 5.7 per cent – more than double the national average. It is worse than Liverpool (5.4 per cent), Nottingham (4.3 per cent), Manchester (3.9 per cent), Newcastle-on-Tyne (3.4 per cent), Leeds (2.9 per cent), Sheffield (2.8 per cent) and Bristol (2.4 per cent).

However, on education, Birmingham comes top of the cities' league table, with 41 per cent of children obtaining at least five good GCSE passes, far better than Liverpool on 36 per cent and Manchester and Nottingham on 29 per cent. The national average for England is 46 per cent.

But these figures are boosted by the good performance of the city's independent schools and grammars. Among non-selective state schools, 73 per cent (49 out of 67) perform below the national average at GCSE.

The report also highlights pockets of severe poverty in the city. In the Washwood Heath ward in the Hodge Hill parliamentary constituency, a third of residents have never worked or are long-term unemployed. Among young men, the figure is 40 per cent.

But the report also applauds efforts being made by Birmingham City Council to tackle social breakdown. The city has been ruled by a Conservative-Lib Dem coalition since 2004. For two decades prior to 2004 it was ruled by Labour.

It praises its Kick Start Partnership, which won first prize at the UK Housing Awards for improving the homes of vulnerable owner-occupiers and received a special award for achievement in social housing.

The proportion of council houses meeting the Decent Homes Standard has more than doubled since 2004.

Breakthrough Britain, published in July, contained nearly 200 recommendations for tackling family breakdown, education failure, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol addiction and debt.

Breakthrough Birmingham illustrates how these policies could help the people of the city by, for instance, giving a bigger role to the voluntary sector in fighting poverty and providing personalized programmes to get people back to work.

The report backs a "something for something" welfare culture which would require benefit claimants actively to seek work or lose their state support. The

CSJ has embarked on a further study to reform the welfare system so that it actively incentivises work, strengthens the family and minimizes fraud.

At a press briefing to launch the report, Mr Duncan Smith said: "Birmingham is second only to London in terms of economic output. But this success masks real problems of social breakdown, especially on the work front.

"I applaud the efforts the City Council is making to tackle worklessness and poverty, but for real progress we need radical welfare reform at a national level. I want to work with council leaders in the city to bring about improvements both locally and nationally."

#### NOTES TO EDITORS

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