



justfair

**DEVELOPING SOCIAL RIGHTS IN
NORTH EAST ENGLAND**



INTERIM IMPACT & LEARNING REPORT

NOV 2020



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all our staff and partners, and the members of the Social Rights Alliance North East (SRANE) for their ongoing support and efforts to work for social justice and improved economic and social rights in the UK.

We would also like to thank the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for supporting the initial development of SRANE and our COVID-19 response work, and Sophie Ahmad for her time and expertise as an external evaluator in creating the bones and structure of this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North East England is a region known for its high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. For decades it has felt the sting of various UK Government policies, with many communities struggling to thrive. Austerity measures have hit communities hard and highlighted the need for urgent change. But the region is not homogenous, and so requires locally specific, non-London-centric approach to social change and justice.

Learning from initiatives and projects in other parts of the UK and abroad, Just Fair has sought to establish a grassroots-based way to enable rights holders to claim their rights.

In early 2019, with a 'Test and Explore' grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Just Fair recruited a North East based community organiser who has worked to create the Social Rights Alliance North East (SRANE). The community organiser has explored how economic and social rights (ESR) increase the effectiveness of social justice campaigns and provide common ground for people working on seemingly isolated issues.



The Infinity Bridge in Stockton-on-Tees

The development of the SRANE has included an in-depth listening process and the building of trusting relationships and solid partnerships with individuals and local organisations. A number of workshops on ESR have led to the development of the Talk.Act.Change Toolkit and subsequent 'Guide to Local Politicians'. Both resources were designed to be used by anyone and seek to increase confidence and skills in people who have little to no campaign experience. The main issues identified by SRANE focus on high cost of public transport and adult education provision, particularly for women in rural areas and asylum seekers.

Navigating the challenges of COVID-19 has been unsurprisingly difficult. All community and existing campaign work halted and most SRANE partners' workloads intensified or were placed on furlough. Work in the North East became reactionary and focused on immediate needs of members and NE residents. Conversations with some members highlighted the problems around digital inclusion faced during the pandemic. A collaboration of NE organisations and individuals led to the creation of Better ConNEcted, a digital inclusion project, and has become one of SRANE's main focuses.

This report details the creation and growth of SRANE through the first stages of its journey, and its intended adaptations to the new circumstances the UK finds itself in. It explores the added value of human rights and ESR to social justice work, as well as the role of community organisers in bringing people together, and draws out conclusions and next steps.

Moving forward, a restructure of SRANE is needed to improve collaboration and ensure that the voices of individuals and people experiencing poverty and inequality are at the centre of its efforts. To achieve this, members have planned to divide the current membership into a more official SRANE and a supporters' network. The two bodies will support and interact with each other, but SRANE will consist of passionate members with shared values and a commitment to using ESR and a rights-based approach to tackle local issues together.

SRANE will also start to carve its own identity, separate from Just Fair, to maintain greater integrity as a voice of the region – distinct from the agenda of a UK based charity. The lessons learned so far from the development of SRANE are being shared with two new Just Fair staff working on social rights alliances in Manchester and Yorkshire & Humber.

SRANE members will be meeting at the end of 2020 to confirm SRANE's new structure, focus campaigns and support its development on the next stage of its journey.

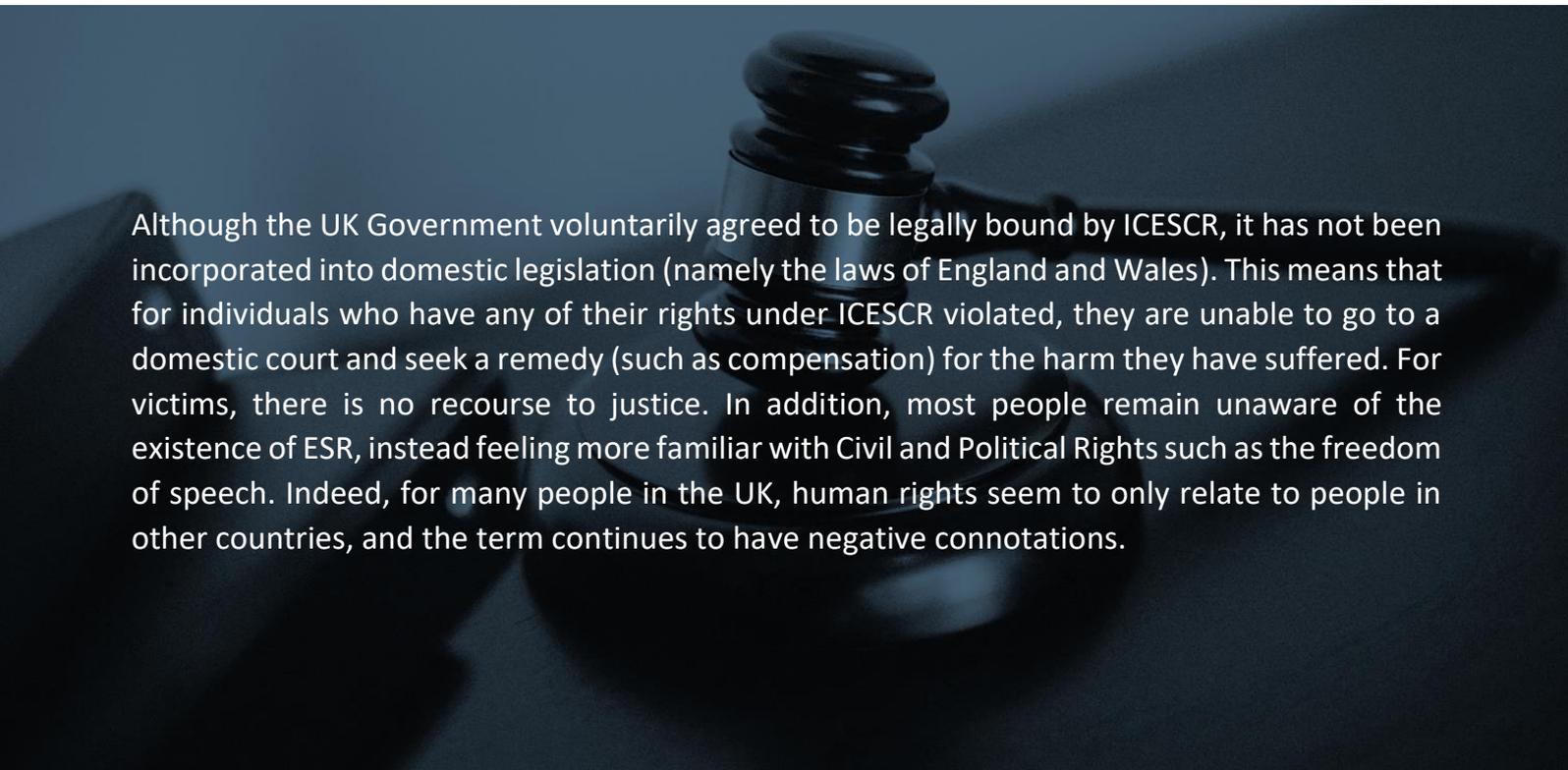


WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

THE BACKGROUND

Just Fair is a charity that seeks to monitor and advocate for compliance with human rights (HR) in the UK. It focuses on a particular group of rights known as economic and social rights (ESR). These include rights to education, food, housing, health, social security, work, and an adequate standard of living. In international law, the main human rights instrument which recognises ESR is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). ICESCR was ratified by the UK Government in 1976.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) monitors how well states like the UK are implementing ICESCR on a five-yearly cycle. The committee takes into account evidence provided by governments, civil society organisations, and national HR institutions. The last UN report on the UK, published in July 2016, raised a number of important concerns about the UK Government's compliance with ICESCR.



Although the UK Government voluntarily agreed to be legally bound by ICESCR, it has not been incorporated into domestic legislation (namely the laws of England and Wales). This means that for individuals who have any of their rights under ICESCR violated, they are unable to go to a domestic court and seek a remedy (such as compensation) for the harm they have suffered. For victims, there is no recourse to justice. In addition, most people remain unaware of the existence of ESR, instead feeling more familiar with Civil and Political Rights such as the freedom of speech. Indeed, for many people in the UK, human rights seem to only relate to people in other countries, and the term continues to have negative connotations.

Just Fair is committed to ensuring that people in the UK can enjoy their ESR. This includes increasing public awareness so that individuals and organisations can monitor and advocate for their ESR and researching and campaigning for the UK Government to protect, respect and fulfil ESR. Just Fair seeks to support these outcomes by:

- Scrutinising and informing public body decision-makers by conducting research, producing policy briefings, and holding expert training, to demonstrate the value of rights-based policy
- Working with, and learning from, international and national human rights institutions and networks
- Forging alliances with groups beyond the legal human rights community to bring these rights to life for everyone



Community groups in central London speaking out about ESR issues they face to UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Phillip Alston (Nov 2018)

A SOCIAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE FOR THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND - AIMS & OBJECTIVES

In 2018, as part of its commitment to building a bigger and more diverse movement to advocate for ESR, Just Fair set out to develop a social rights alliance in the North East of England (SRANE). This was its first attempt to build such an alliance on this scale in the UK, although it drew on learning from initiatives in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Spain. This was also the first time that Just Fair had focused its attentions on a particular region and centred its work at the community level.

The North East of England was partly chosen because of its high levels of poverty and inequality in relation to other regions in England. In addition, community relations in the region were negatively impacted following the European Union referendum, which in many places led to increased division between settled and migrant communities, as well as increased levels of hate crime motivated by racism.

The first two years of this work have been supported by an Explore and Test grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF). This allowed Just Fair to appoint a new community organiser to coordinate work in the region.

In carrying out this work, Just Fair set out to explore two main questions:

1. Does using the framework of HR/ESR help local people to bring about positive social change more effectively? If so, how?
2. What is the best approach to building a successful social rights alliance in a region?

As well as these questions, Just Fair intended to test several assumptions around using an HR/ESR framework. Would such a framework help to give people common ground when confronting seemingly separate issues? Would it help to highlight the root causes of inequalities and rights violations? Would it enable a more effective, energised, and collaborative effort in the search for greater social justice?

At the start of the two years of PHF funding, Just Fair developed a logic model (Appendix A) for the programme with support from a PHF evaluation consultant. This set out programme activities and intended outcomes for different groups of people. Some of the intended outcomes in the model are long-term changes that will only become evident over time (beyond the first two years of the programme).

'All too often, people's basic rights and needs are ignored and not valued. Policies are implemented and decisions are made to and on behalf of low-income communities - arguably 'in their best interest' which erode fundamental necessities leaving people and communities impoverished. This cannot prevail.'

Tracey Herrington, Thrive Teesside, SRANE Member (organisation)

OUR JOURNEY BEGINS

THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORK

Groundwork for the project was laid in 2018 when Just Fair's then Policy Director began to explore initial ideas with local partners in the North East of England. The visit to the North East in November 2018 of the UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights helped to highlight [significant threats](#) to the ESR of people in the region (and elsewhere in the UK) and raise awareness of the need for action. Combined with a need for improved integration and relations between migrant and settled communities, there appeared a clear appetite in the region for a project of this nature.

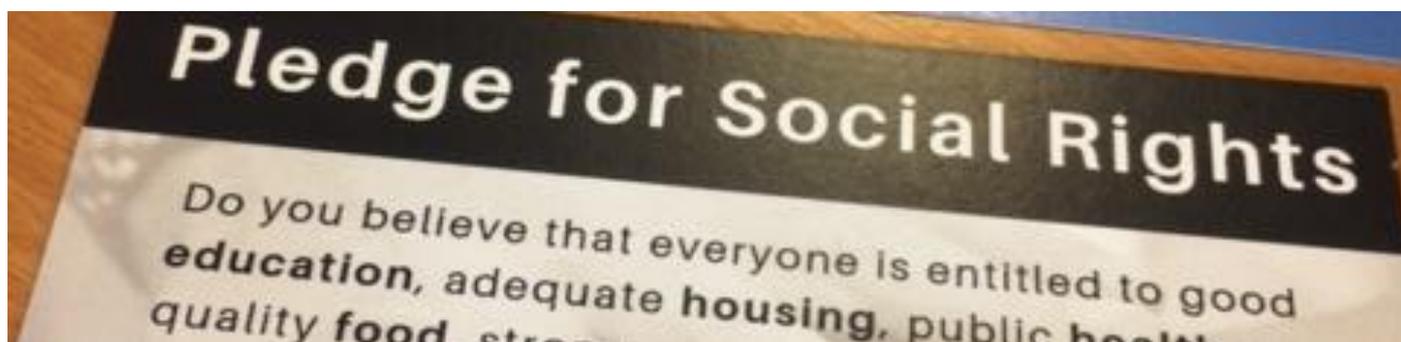
The main work began following the appointment of a new community organiser in January 2019. In addition to the partners initially consulted in 2018, the community organiser brought her own networks and contacts from several years of living and working in the community sector in the North East of England. Much of 2019 was taken up with forming relationships, exploring local people's priorities, and building awareness of HR/ESR through a series of conversations and small workshops.

UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Phillip Alston, listens to a group of people sitting round a table in Newcastle (Nov 2018)



The original plan for the programme envisaged a first year of introducing residents and community groups to HR/ESR and building support for the idea of a social rights alliance. This would enable the community organiser to work with local people to identify a campaign to work on in the second year. However, it soon became clear that focusing solely on developing the alliance itself was not the best way to proceed. Instead, it was important to start by first exploring the issues that mattered most to local people. After previous experiences of national, London-based organisations imposing their change agendas on people in the region, it felt crucial to focus the initial stages on listening to local people's priorities. This was essential in forming relationships of trust that could be built on.

Just Fair's original workshops on HR/ESR were developed to ensure they were interactive and practical. Rather than developing a toolkit upfront to guide conversations on the topic, this emerged out of the first set of workshops. Testing and improving the toolkit in this way ensured key concepts were communicated simply and effectively. It also made the process of capturing the issues that local people cared about easier. The initial idea to develop an advocacy guide to support campaigning in the second year was also postponed as the community organiser quickly recognised that people needed the opportunity to first broaden their knowledge of the political system, including who their political representatives were and how they operate.



The SRANE pledge card

THE ALLIANCE TAKES SHAPE

During 2019 the community organiser met with over 100 groups and individuals. These included food banks, frontline services, community individuals, local authorities and regional networks. All expressed support for what Just Fair were trying to achieve in the region. Many of them decided to sign up to the SRANE pledge (Appendix B) and mailing list to keep in the loop with project developments and help to shape SRANE as time went on. At this stage, it was easier to connect with groups and charities to engage with more people living the experience of poverty or ESR violations.

In May 2019, the community organiser held the first ESR workshop in Newcastle. Its aim was to educate participants in basic ESR law and understand how this applied to their day-to-day lives. The participants were encouraged to identify ESR issues that might be affecting them and share their ideas of how they could be improved. It was attended by 20 people, most of whom were volunteers, staff, or participants in local charities.

Over the year a further 4 workshops of similar size and format took place with 61 participants, including a women-only workshop. Issues identified ranged from zero hours contracts to free school meals and public transport provision. The workshop content and format were adapted and tested during this time and so became more engaging and successful at identifying issues. This evolved into the Talk.Act.Change Conversation Toolkit, which was designed to be used by anyone, can be downloaded or requested in print. The toolkit includes information about ESR and equality, a response sheet for answers, and a workshop format.



Participants of the Sanctuary in Politics Course identify ESR issues they face in the region as asylum seekers (Sep 2019)



Tracey Herrington, Thrive Teesside speaks at a SRANE workshop about their rights-based approach campaign on the socio-economic duty (Jul 2019)

"Until I got involved, I didn't realise how much of my human rights weren't addressed or how I could voice my concerns. I'm a small voice in a very large world. Having the help and knowledge of SRANE, as a larger voice we can express ourselves better and louder."

SRANE Member (individual)

Several smaller workshops with specific community groups were held later in the year with the purpose of creating a less daunting space for people to raise their issues and concerns. One workshop was held at a Northern Learning Trust centre in rural Northumberland with a group of adults studying to improve their English and Maths and employability prospects.

Participants at this workshop explained how inadequate benefits payments and high housing and public transport costs was leaving them with little money left at the end of the month. The addition of a new Council Tax payment following changes in the Welfare Reform Act (2012) meant they often ended the month needing to borrow money from friends or family. The group identified a potential solution in getting the local authority to drop the payment for those on full benefits. They decided to take this idea forward with the community organiser and were excited to learn how to campaign for change.



Two Just Fair staff holding an SRANE pledge card outside Shelter North East before running a workshop (May 2019)



A community group sitting discussing rights around a table at SRANE's Teesside workshop (Jul 2019)

Another example was a workshop run for City of Sanctuary's 'Sanctuary in Politics' course. Around 20 asylum seekers and refugees (mostly from the North East of England) took part. Participants in this workshop identified issues around accessing adult education, particularly university. One solution suggested was focused on improving Sanctuary Scholarships, an issue that was later adopted by SRANE as a focal point for campaigning. Some universities in the UK offer Sanctuary Scholarships, waiving tuition fees for asylum seeker applicants. In some cases, they also provide a grant towards learning and/or housing costs. These scholarships make it possible for more adults to have their right to education realised in the UK.

This varied engagement gave the community organiser the opportunity to introduce the notion of an alliance gradually and organically as relationships developed. By January 2020, over 65 people had expressed an interest in being part of SRANE and had signed up to the SRANE Pledge.

The relationships that the community organiser developed during 2019 resulted in numerous requests for her to get involved in supporting other groups and campaigns to frame their work in the language and concepts of HR/ESR. These included:

- Supporting an alliance of disability organisations in the North East of England to frame their COVID-19 '[Manifesto for a Better Normal](#)'
- Adding HR framing to a regional campaign on raising child benefit payments
- Supporting the Health and Race Equality Forum Allies to understand the need to improve access to healthcare for BAME communities from a HR perspective



The community organiser speaks to the Health and Race Equality Forum Allies about the right to health (Aug 2019)



The Newcastle United Football Club Fans Foodbank supporting Just Fair's the #1forEquality campaign (Apr 2019)

Being based in the North East of England, the community organiser was also well placed to provide regional support for Just Fair's national campaigning activity, including its work to encourage implementation of Section 1 of the Equality Act (#1forEquality) – the socio-economic duty.

In addition to her work on SRANE, the community organiser has been successful in getting four local authorities in the North East to approve a motion expressing support for the socio-economic duty, and three more authorities are considering following suit. The organiser supported Gateshead Council and North Tyne Combined Authority to voluntarily implement the duty—something very few local authorities have achieved in England.



Equality Act 2010
2010 CHAPTER 15

1 to require...

The first SRANE meeting was held on 28th January 2020 with a mixture of individuals, civil society groups and local authority officers. Civil society attendees included representatives from legal charities, regional youth organisations, energy campaigns, and organisations supporting people with 'lived experience' of poverty.

The 25-30 participants attending had the chance to consider the key issues that had come out of the first year of workshops and conversations. There was most energy behind two potential campaigns. The first was on reducing the costs of public transport, since this is prohibitively expensive for those trying to get back to work after a long period of unemployment, needing to access food banks, or on benefits. Members shared their own experiences of needing to take several buses all at high cost to access their local library or make it to a budget supermarket. This issue was identified as a major concern and barrier to people on low incomes accessing necessities.



Participants of SRANE's first Newcastle ESR workshop discuss what makes a fair and equal world (May 2019)

The second campaign idea related to adult education. In previous workshops, rural women's groups spoke of a lack of provision of courses in their area that were not 'hobby courses'. Asylum seekers had identified many challenges around accessing education due to language barriers, inability to access extra time in exams, and high cost of transport to access courses. During SRANE's meeting, these issues were honed down to focus on increasing the number of Sanctuary Scholarships on offer in the region and to increase the level of support provided by universities in the region under these schemes.

SRANE had plans to meet again at the end of March to begin developing campaign strategies for both ideas.



A woman looking through a stack of books at a library

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

RESPONDING TO IMMEDIATE NEEDS

In March 2020, this work came to a halt when the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a nationwide lockdown. As many of the partners who were working on the fledgling SRANE campaigns were civil society organisations, this meant staff were furloughed, and others were increasingly stretched dealing with the crisis, reducing capacity to progress the campaigns in the immediate term. On top of this, some integral members of SRANE and those in the smaller campaign groups (i.e. the Northern Learning Trust group) did not have digital access, so communicating during the lockdown proved impossible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fostered new levels of social solidarity. It has reminded people of what they have in common and that when they act together rather than just for themselves, everyone benefits. However, COVID-19 has also laid bare the historic and structural inequalities that already existed between people. The pandemic has disproportionately affected Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people, older and disabled people and their families, women, those in poverty, insecure housing or precarious employment and people who have come to the UK to escape difficult circumstances abroad.

The community organiser began responding to the needs of SRANE organisations to help safeguard their rights during the crisis. This included lobbying Northumbria University on behalf of a SRANE member who is an asylum seeker and sanctuary scholar to provide adequate support to continue his studies at home. This led to a short campaign to get North East universities offering sanctuary scholarships to improve the level of digital support available to sanctuary scholars and to ensure a member of staff was in place as a main contact for them to raise their issues and concerns. Other work included supporting Asylum Matters – a leading national organisation advocating for improvements to asylum policy and practice - with mapping efforts and cataloguing issues experienced by those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in the region. This helped organisations to coordinate efforts and build a stronger picture of how those with NRPF were being neglected by UK Government COVID-19 efforts.

THE 'BETTER CONNECTED' CAMPAIGN BEGINS

As the lockdown went on, two SRANE partners, the Recovery College Collective (ReCoCo) in Newcastle and the North East Law Centre, approached the community organiser to express concerns about how the pandemic was affecting some of the groups they were supporting. They were concerned that already marginalised groups and those hit hardest by COVID-19 measures were being disproportionately affected by the lockdown because they were not able to access support services and educational and other opportunities that had largely shifted online.

The community organiser helped ReCoCo to devise a survey for a wider set of partners to explore their experiences in relation to digital exclusion. Results suggested this was a widely shared concern and a clear priority for action. The community organiser also carried out a mapping exercise to identify other digital inclusion efforts underway across the North East of England where efforts could be combined.



With support from partners, and some additional funding from PHF, the community organiser took on the role of co-ordinating (alongside a colleague from ReCoCo) a new campaign on digital inclusion in the region. The aims of the campaign are to help ensure that:

- digital inclusion responses of SRANE members to the COVID-19 crisis are more effectively coordinated, and,
- in turn, more people in the North East of England have access to information and support to keep them safe and well and protect their rights, and
- digital inclusion is widely recognised as a gateway to our ESR and therefore a necessity



Currently, a diverse group of 15 organisations and two residents are involved in campaign development. These include asylum seeker and refugee organisations, disabled people's charities, mental health support teams and homelessness charities. The campaign was officially launched in August 2020 and has steadily picked up steam. Currently, there are 30 people signed up to a mailing list and the campaign receives regular emails requesting support, sharing information/services, or asking to get involved via its website. Over the coming months, the [Better ConNEcted](#) team intend to continue:

- Approaching local businesses encouraging them to donate data-enabled tablets to community groups in the region,
- Working with local authorities to make digital inclusion a priority in their departments,
- Searching for funding to provide accessibility training to businesses and organisations so that more disabled people can access info online, and
- Writing blogs and engaging people on social media to encourage a culture shift in the region around digital access.

It has become clear that the only thing holding the campaign back is a lack of capacity amongst the team. The group have recently agreed to start searching for funding to hire a part-time coordinator for the campaign. This would enable Better ConNEcted to reach more supporters and donors, as well as explore more creative ways to help people get online. Some ideas to explore include data banks, refurbishing second-hand equipment from businesses, and free data packages from mobile providers for specific groups or individuals.



"As a larger voice we can
express ourselves better
and louder."

SRANE Member (individual)

THE ALLIANCE CONTINUES

On 6th August 2020, SRANE was reconvened for its second meeting, this time online. The meeting was an opportunity to revisit the campaign ideas discussed in January and set a direction for the Alliance's future work in the context of COVID-19. It was also a chance to explore interest amongst SRANE members in getting behind the new digital inclusion campaign.

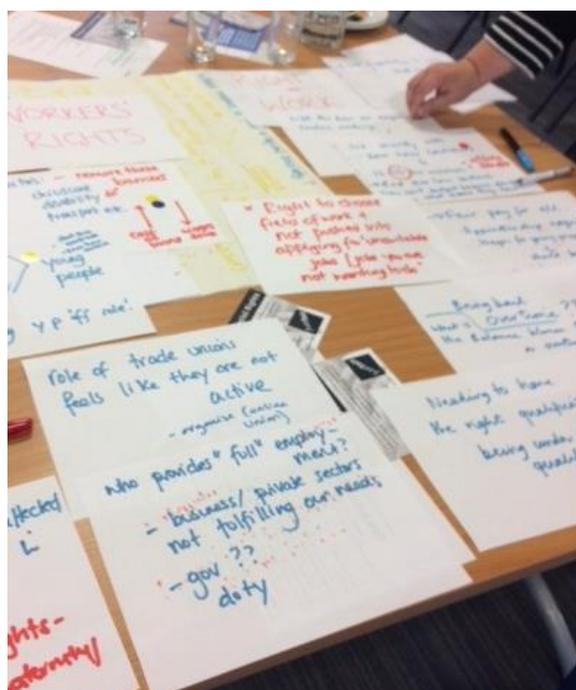
The participants re-examined the purpose, aims and desired outcomes of SRANE. Through this process the distinctive role that SRANE can play in the region was drawn out:

- To improve ESR in the region, thereby improving lives and transforming communities
- To empower rights holders to claim their rights
- To educate people on ESR

To improve the effectiveness of SRANE, it was decided that the current structure needed to change.

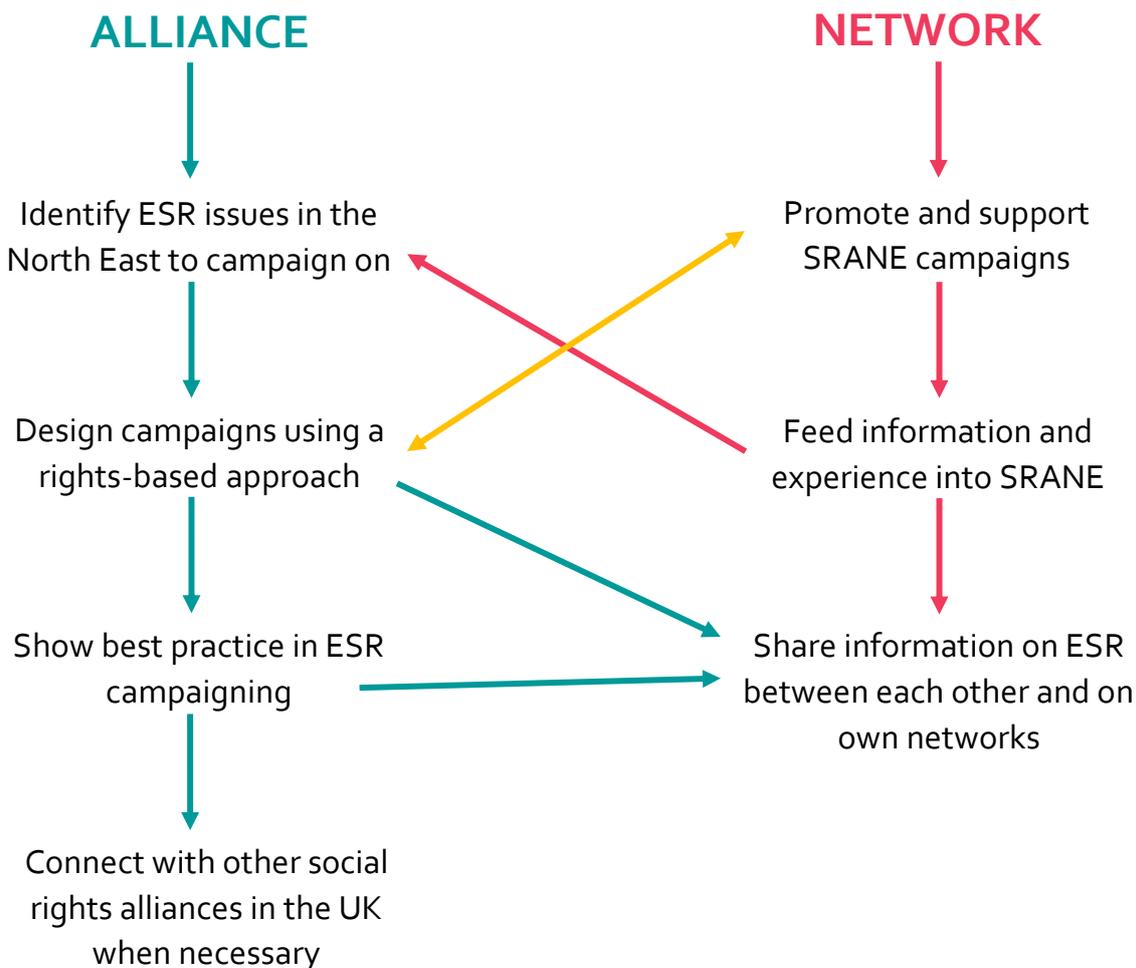
As it stands, members are predominantly civil society organisations that have little to no input into decisions or accompanying actions. In reality, it operates more as a network than as an active alliance.

To remedy this, members decided to split the existing membership list into a more formal SRANE and a network of supporters. The aim of SRANE is to campaign on ESR in the North East using a rights-based approach. SRANE will promote best practice in ESR and connect with social rights alliances in other parts of the UK and other networks. SRANE will have several campaigns which will be owned by the alliance and supported by network members or others.



Ideas of how to advance the right to food in Teesside written on sheets of paper at an SRANE workshop (Jul 2019)

The aim of the supporters' network is to promote and support SRANE campaigns, share information on ESR and feed information and experiences into SRANE to inform the campaigns. Members have agreed: shared values (including commitment to HR) collaboration, that all contributions are valued, difference is respected, and that SRANE's efforts are non-formulaic.



The next steps for SRANE are to notify the current network of the changes. This will give people an opportunity to reassess their level of involvement and decide if they wish to be part of the supporters' network or of SRANE itself. Another online gathering for confirmed Alliance members will be arranged before the end of the year to settle on the campaign issues it wishes to take forward over the coming months.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

2018

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

MAY: Explore & Test grant received from Paul Hamlyn Foundation

NOV: UN Special Rapporteur visits North East England providing an opportunity to galvanise support for the work

2019

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS & BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

JAN: Anya Bonner joins Just Fair as a community organiser for the North East of England

MAY: First workshop on ESR held in Newcastle. Participants identify issues to address and propose solutions

Launch of SRANE pledge

AUG: First small community workshop at Newbiggin Learning Hive with 9 local residents

NOV: Campaign development begins with Newbiggin Learning Hive on Council Tax Reduction Schemes

DEC: 70 people have signed SRANE pledge

Talk.Act.Change Conversation Toolkit is launched

2020

IDENTIFYING CAMPAIGNS & RESPONDING TO COVID

JAN: First SRANE meeting attracts 30 organisations and individuals. Interest in possible campaigns on public transport & adult education

MAR: COVID-19 lockdown leads to online working. Inequalities increase. Work with community groups halt

APR: Community organiser begins coordinating Better ConNEcted campaign alongside North East Law Centre

Paul Hamlyn Foundation award emergency grant for Better ConNEcted campaign & SRANE project under current funding is extended to Mar 2021

JUL: Just Fair appoint SRA coordinators for the North West and England with support from Tudor Trust

AUG: Second SRANE gathering held online. Structure of SRANE is redesigned

DEC: SRANE meets in its new form for the first time. Campaign efforts are decided

2021

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

JAN: Begin campaign development for SRANE

FEB: Identify key SRANE members to maintain campaign efforts and communications

MAR: Current Paul Hamlyn Foundation funding ends

HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR WORK

8 WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS HELD OVER 8 MONTHS



A programme for the Talk.Act.Change Teesside workshop (Jul 2019)

122 people & organisations have had the opportunity to learn more about HR/ESR & explore how they might be used to promote positive change in the North East of England. Many of these people signed up to SRANE and several workshops led to further campaign development workshops.

"Using economic & social rights has improved our campaigning by giving people more confidence to challenge from a position of knowledge and power."

SRANE Collaborator (organisation)

DEVELOPMENT OF BETTER CONNECTED – A CAMPAIGN FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION IN THE NORTH EAST

15 organisations and 2 individuals are now campaigning to improve digital inclusion in the region to create a fairer, more equal North East.

The campaign, co-coordinated by the community organiser and members of SRANE, is using a rights-based approach to promote access to the internet as a necessity and to find practical solutions with local businesses to help more people get online.



“Using principles of a rights-based approach has helped to shape Better ConNEcted from initial goal development and how we present our campaign to the public, to our asks from businesses and local government. Digital inclusion is not currently a human right but is tied closely to many economic and social rights (such as food, health and work). Framing our campaign this way challenges the idea that digital access is just a luxury for those who can afford it and puts pressure on the UK Government to act.”

SRANE Member (organisation)

JUST FAIR INVITED TO ADVISE ON HR/ESR FRAMING FOR OTHER REGIONAL CAMPAIGNS

As SRANE has become more established in the region, Just Fair has been approached by several organisations to support with human rights framing and help shape fledgling campaigns. This includes work on the right to education and school exclusions; increases to Child Benefit payments; and the Manifesto for a Better Normal (in which Just Fair are now a key partner).



A women's group in Northumberland take part in an ESR workshop (Nov 2019)

68 PEOPLE & ORGANISATIONS SIGNED UP TO THE SRANE 'PLEDGE'

The SRANE Pledge exists as a foundation for the shared values that SRANE members must have. By signing the pledge, individuals and organisations have signed up to SRANE and its aims.

“When I think about the way we used ESR to help frame the Manifesto for a Better Normal work, I think it has been helpful in contextualising the campaign so that even if an audience is not familiar with disability law, they will hopefully see the relevance of human rights law. It’s also a framework which applies equally to all types of disability, so helps provide some ‘glue’ to bond the differing elements within the disability sector.”

- Difference North East, SRANE Member (organisation)

TESTING ASSUMPTIONS

ENABLING A DIFFERENT KIND OF CONVERSATION

One of the assumptions informing this work was that using the framework of HR/ESR would help frame a different kind of conversation - one that would enable people to spot connections between issues that appear on the surface to be distinct and to see the common, underlying injustices driving them all. We hoped that this, in turn, would help to release energy for change. There is some evidence that this is starting to happen.



Ideas on what makes an equal society from the Newcastle workshop (May 2019)

At SRANE's initial gathering in January 2019, participants discussed the 5 key issues that had come up throughout the various conversations and workshops over the year: zero hours contracts; high cost of public transport; lack of public transport provision in rural areas; poor adult education provision for women in rural areas; asylum seekers and refugees; and council tax reduction schemes for those on full benefits.

Whilst all seemingly separate issues, ESR framing brought all these topics into one conversation. It highlighted socio-economic inequality and a lack of an adequate standard of living as an underlying thread tying these issues together.

The Better ConNEcted campaign evidenced how an HR/ESR framework has supported people with 'independent' issues to come together to work in unison.

Framing the campaign in this way has meant that a variety of organisations feel they have a voice at the table. The campaign comprises a very diverse group, including those focused on digital inclusion for disabled people, people with learning disabilities and mental health issues, those seeking asylum and refuge, people living with NRPF, and single parents.



A FRAMEWORK FOR BRINGING DIVERSE GROUPS TOGETHER

A second key assumption informing this work was that using the framework of HR/ESR would allow a more diverse coalition of people & organisations to come together under a common umbrella. Ultimately, the hope was that this would lead to more effective & inclusive campaigning. There is some evidence that this is starting to happen.



In early workshops, one woman who had previously stood as a British National Party councillor in local elections spoke up to say that HRs were important because they applied to everyone, no matter what their background was.

Running workshops with asylum seekers and refugees highlighted the issue of a lack of Sanctuary Scholarships in the region. This also led to one member joining and forming a core part of the Alliance group and Better ConNEcted campaign.



Just Fair acknowledges that more can be done to improve the diversity of voice and experience within SRANE. As SRANE develops, the community organiser will make a more conscious effort to connect with BAME and disabled people's groups in the region. For this to be successful, Just Fair and the community organiser will need to ensure that communications are diverse in language, tone and accessible to a variety of people. Plans are currently in place to commission Easy Read and British Sign Language versions of key documents and texts available on the SRANE website pages.

LEARNING & ISSUES TO CONSIDER

TIMESCALES FOR CHANGE

It has taken time to build up trusting relationships with potential partners in the region; the COVID-19 pandemic struck just as SRANE was poised to move forward with its campaigning work. SRANE now has a good foundation for action but is still at an early stage of development.

The most important learning from the programme to date is that building a social rights alliance is a long-term endeavour. It is not realistic to forge relationships, work with a group of people to identify shared priorities, develop effective campaigns and begin to see evidence of the benefits of using a rights-based approach within two years, starting from scratch. Instead, this is better conceived as the initial stage of a five or ten-year project. This is even more difficult to achieve during a global pandemic, national lockdown and completely online, despite the need being greater than ever.

The development of a new team of three community organisers at Just Fair (focusing on the North East of England, North West of England, Yorkshire & Humber and England-wide) offers an opportunity to pool insights about how to develop a sustainable alliance and what one might realistically expect to see in terms of progress over time. The team plan to reflect this insight in a refreshed logic model and theory of change for the work.



Groups create a Power Matrix at a SRANE workshop to identify where the support and main influence lies in the region on a particular issue (Jul 2019)

THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY ORGANISER

The experience of building a social rights alliance in the North East has also confirmed the importance of the community organiser role. While Just Fair's community organiser was not a legal expert in HR/ESR, she brought highly developed relationship building skills and these have proved central to the progress that has been made to date.

In many ways, not being a legal specialist has had some advantages in that it has equalised the power dynamic between community organiser and local people and allowed SRANE members to learn together. The term 'community organiser', however, has not always been helpful as it often means specific things to different people. In seeking to build new social rights alliances elsewhere in the UK this perhaps needs to be considered.

While the community organiser has tried to stand back from the work as much as possible and encourage others to lead, it is clear that this is not really feasible in the short term as those involved currently lack the time and skills to identify issues and campaign across a complex network. Without further funding to sustain the role, for at least another two to three years, it seems unlikely that the work will be sustained.



A group of people discuss solutions to ESR issues at a SRANE workshop (Jul 2019)

WORKING ACROSS A DIVERSE REGION



An English housing estate

The description of our journey to date has illustrated the importance of adapting the approach to building a social rights alliance to suit the local context. It is clear from this work that while there may be some ingredients of a successful approach, there is no template. The approach needs to be locally specific.

Another key insight is the challenge of working across a whole region, particularly with one member of staff. The North East of England is not a homogenous entity, it is a large, complex, and highly diverse area and the priority issues look very different in different places.

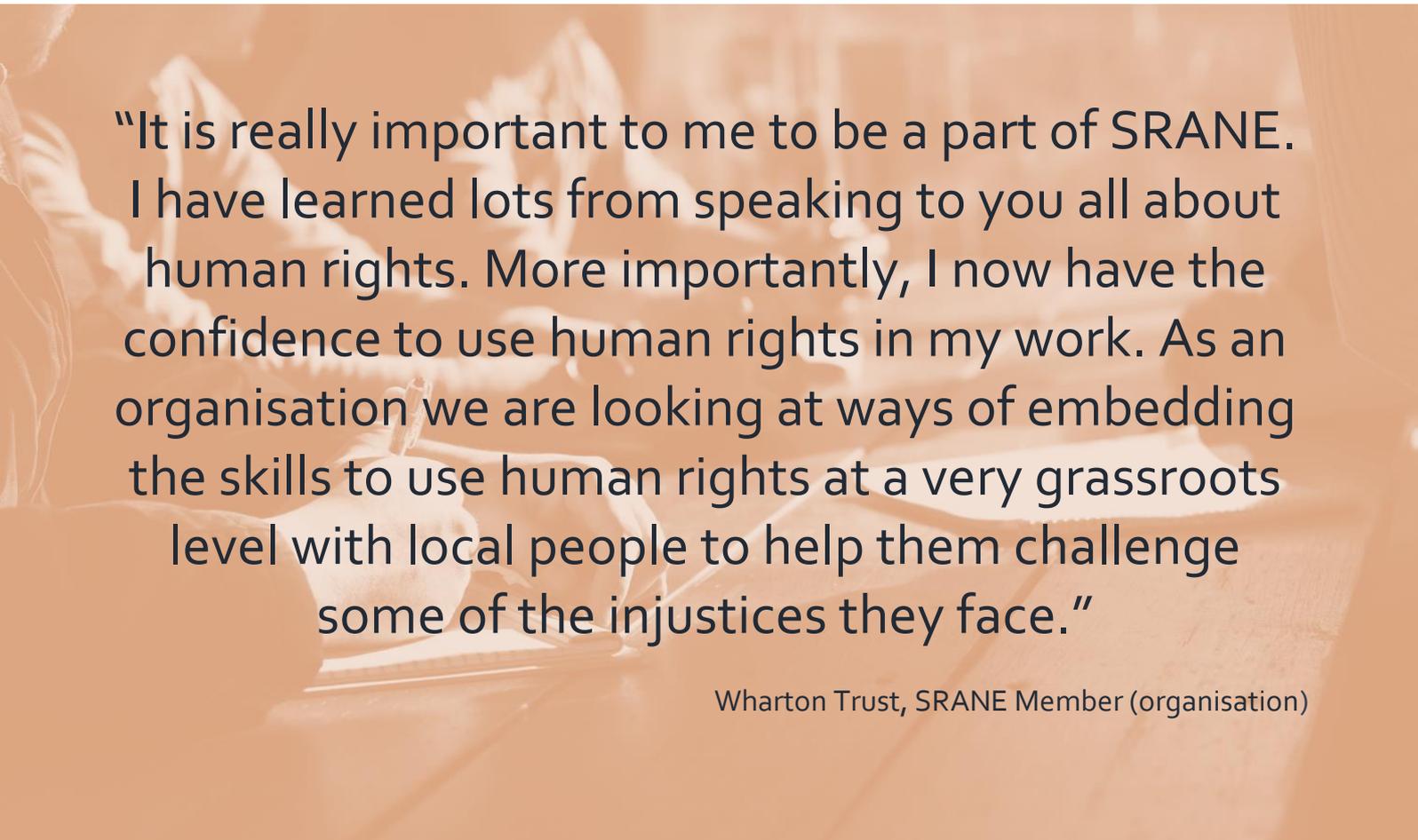
To ensure that SRANE addresses local needs effectively, the listening process must continue throughout, and those with direct experience of the issues raised must have a central voice in shaping the campaigns and solutions proposed.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ALLIANCE?

At present, SRANE is a group of people and organisations who want to use HR/ESR to campaign for change in the North East of England. There is no expectation about members' contribution; some people who have signed the SRANE Pledge may not go on to attend meetings on a regular basis, and there are other people in the region who are interested in using a rights based approach but may not choose to join SRANE.

This raises an interesting question about what SRANE is and could be in the future. In particular, it raises a question about the extent to which SRANE should be striving to lead its own, independent campaigns, or whether it is better conceived as a looser network, or repository of expertise, that supports and contributes to campaigns led elsewhere, by others.

The Just Fair team are keen to explore SRANE members' thoughts on this question. The community organiser has been working with new colleagues working on building alliances in other places to reimagine the theory of change for SRANE.



“It is really important to me to be a part of SRANE. I have learned lots from speaking to you all about human rights. More importantly, I now have the confidence to use human rights in my work. As an organisation we are looking at ways of embedding the skills to use human rights at a very grassroots level with local people to help them challenge some of the injustices they face.”

Wharton Trust, SRANE Member (organisation)

THE ROLE OF A NATIONAL CHARITY IN THE REGIONS

As SRANE develops, Just Fair must strike an appropriate balance between supporting work that matters to local people in the North East of England and using its regional presence to further its own national campaign priorities that aim to benefit local people.

In contributing to work outside of SRANE it will be important to consider how to ensure this is aligned with Just Fair's values and goals, while respecting local people's agency. This perhaps illustrates some of the interesting challenges involved in thinking through how a national charity should operate in a regional context. It has become clear to Just Fair that SRANE needs to develop its own identity with Just Fair providing host support.



The Tyne Bridge in Newcastle

“Being part of a social rights network aligns very well with our values and aims at Difference North East. Our members are disabled people whose access to their basic human rights are too often restricted due to environmental, social, and political barriers. Being part of SRANE allows us to work collaboratively with others in our region and means we can ensure that the particular issues faced by disabled people are properly considered and represented.”

Richard Boggie, Difference North East, SRANE Member (organisation)

REFLECTING ON OUR WORK FOR THE FUTURE

CONCLUSIONS

The past 2 years have seen the community organiser engage in a creative and responsive process, building solid relationships with individuals and organisations across the region. An ESR framework is providing opportunities to bring diverse organisations together, find common ground and work for change.

Whilst there are still many assumptions to test and questions to answer, it is clear that there is an appetite in the region for greater knowledge and understanding of ESR and how to use a rights-based approach to tackle social injustice. On top of this, SRANE will be going through some structural changes to improve efficiency, commitment from its members and engagement in campaigns over the coming months.



NEXT STEPS

The next steps for SRANE will be heavily influenced by changes to COVID-19 measures and whether Just Fair receives further funding to continue the project. With that in mind, the immediate next steps are:

- Notify the current SRANE network of structural changes, and encourage people to commit more fully to the SRANE and its aims
- Host an online gathering of confirmed SRANE 'Alliance' members by the end of the 2020 to confirm campaign issues to take forward in 2021
- Create a communications plan for the SRANE supporters' network to effectively disseminate news, campaign information and ESR tips
- Develop a more concrete and thorough monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and accompanying tools
- Develop plans to deliver cross-community workshops on ESR
- Develop plans to create local tools and resources to support advocacy activities



OUR APPROACH

To date, we have been reflecting on our progress and the impact of our work in the following ways:

- The community organiser has been completing a reflections diary monthly
- The Just Fair team has been reflecting on progress and learning at weekly team meetings
- The community organiser has been sharing experiences and learning with the two new community organisers appointed to develop social rights alliances across England, and colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland
- Feedback from SRANE members has been gathered at meetings and workshops

In future, the team plans to:

- Collect more regular feedback from SRANE members to test their developing understanding of HR/ESR, the usefulness of taking a rights-based approach to change, and their views about Just Fair's coordination role via structured discussions or surveys
- Capture case studies of where taking a rights-based approach has helped partners to work more effectively together
- (In the longer-term) Interrogate campaign activity to explore the factors that contribute to campaign outcomes, in particular the role of HR/ESR framing
- (Potentially, over time) Conduct analysis of campaigns and public debate in the North East of England to explore whether the work has resulted in greater take up of a rights-based approach to campaigning and shifted perceptions of HR/ESR

Just Fair welcomes the opportunity to hear from partners about what they have learned from the work to date and how they would like to see it develop in the future.



APPENDICES

A) PROJECT LOGIC MODEL

Just Fair: Developing Social Rights in North East England						
Overall aims: to apply the lessons learned by the most inspiring social rights initiatives from the UK & around the world (inc. Scotland, Northern Ireland & Spain) to help people in North East England realise their rights & build a social rights community in the region; to explore the potential for similar projects elsewhere in the UK						
	Activists/local groups involved in campaigns	Wider local/regional community sector	Local community/residents/public	Local service providers/businesses	Human rights organisations/ field	Just Fair
Long-term Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tangible gains from using HR/ ESR - Continuing use of HR/ESR in campaigns - Greater understanding of HR/ ESR & confidence to use them - Feel part of debate to shape meaning of HR - Wider/more diverse support for campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More people planning campaigns inc. HR/ESR - More people seeking training on HR/ESR - Increased understanding of HR/ ESR & recognition of potential benefits - Increased awareness of sources of support - Feel part of debate to shape HR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater degree of support for/reduced antipathy towards HR/ESR - Greater awareness of existence of HR/ESR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working relationship between activists & local authorities regarding ESR obligations & new projects/ endeavours - Support from some local authorities in region for ESR & SRANE work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater collaboration/ networking with HR organisations in UK - New, more diverse pool of HR advocates outside London - Better understanding of how ESR initiatives can be developed in different parts of the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wider SRA across England with SRANE providing good practice & examples of useful strategies - Just Fair able to 'step back' from SRANE - SRANE grown in the NE - Just Fair better able to assess feasibility of wider ESR alliance - Organising skills
Short-term Outcomes						
Assumptions/ Questions	Assumptions to Test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using the framework of HR/ESR can help activists/local community organisations to bring together a wider/more diverse coalition of groups in support of social change (including migrant & longer established communities) - Sustained, practical, locally based support for activists/local community organisations is key to embedding HR/ESR in local change campaigns 			Questions to Explore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the most important elements of a successful approach to building a social rights community in a local area/region (inc. the role of the Community Organiser)? - When transplanting a model for building a social rights community from one context to another, what are the most important things to consider? - What makes for a successful partnership between a national rights organisation (Just Fair) & local social change organisations? 		
Reach	No of people taking part in conversations & attending workshops/presentations	No of people attending launch event & subsequent SRANE events/ meetings	No of people accessing Just Fair materials (e.g. toolkit, guidance, website)	No of people involved in local campaigns & receiving long-term support from Just Fair	No of community members/ service providers/media outlets reached by campaign activity	
Activities	Year One <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment of locally based p/t community organiser - Initial partnership development work - Design of conversation toolkit - Launch around UN Special Rapporteur visit (& consortium promotion) - Community organiser led workshops to explore ESR (using toolkit) - Identification of campaign to support in year 2 		Year Two <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design of Advocacy Guide - Community organiser supports groups to develop/run campaign using language & principles of HR/ESR (& toolkit, advocacy guide & support from other Just Fair experts in form of convening, training, legal opinion, policy support, messaging, framing, etc) - SRANE network gatherings & campaign development 		Across both years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing efforts to build support for HR/ESR - Ongoing supervision support for community organiser/project from Just Fair Director & team members 	
Inputs	Funding from PHF & other sources			Skills, experience, networks & time of community organiser, other Just Fair staff & trustees, SRANE members/partners, other activists & local community organisations		

B) SRANE PLEDGE CARD

Pledge for Social Rights

Do you believe that everyone is entitled to good **education**, adequate **housing**, public **healthcare**, quality **food**, strong **social security** and a decent **standard of living**?

Are you committed to make social rights real for **everyone**?

Do you want to do this **together**?

www.justfair.org.uk/north-east

@JustFair_NE

justfair

1. Everyone has the right to good education, adequate housing, public healthcare, quality food, strong social security and a decent standard of living.
This is what makes a free and fair society.

2. UK government and local authorities must ensure these rights for everyone without discrimination.
This is their legal responsibility.

3. Public authorities are accountable to the people.
Laws should respect the principle that these are human rights and everyone should be able to take their case to court if any of their rights have been breached.

4. Let's transform. I want to be proud of a society based on social rights and equality.
We have the right to actively participate in decisions that affect us. Businesses, civil society and the general public should also help create the conditions to make social rights a reality for all.

www.justfair.org.uk/north-east

@JustFair_NE