



Local anti-poverty strategies - Good practice and effective approaches

Executive Summary

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Background

Poverty is on the rise, but the UK Government has no plan or strategy to address poverty. Whilst many of the main drivers to tackle poverty lie with central government, the lack of consideration for poverty and its consequences nationally means that action at a local level is more important than ever.

There are examples of good practice and impact from localities where there is a strong policy and strategic focus on addressing poverty, delivered through and steered by a robust anti-poverty strategy. However, there is a lack of up-to-date research that explores best practice and effective approaches in the design and implementation of local anti-poverty strategies.

Based on six in-depth case studies, focus groups with people with lived experience of poverty and experts from across the UK and a review of existing literature, Greater Manchester Poverty Action's report, *Local anti-poverty strategies - Good practice and effective approaches*, helps to fill this gap. The report develops new thinking and valuable insights into the most effective ways to design and implement a local anti-poverty strategy.

Why does a strategic approach matter?

A strategic approach provides local public bodies with a clear sense of direction to take action to address poverty. Our findings emphasise that local anti-poverty strategies add value in three ways:

1. They set clear objectives about how they will be achieved, underpinned by a shared understanding of poverty and its causes.
2. They improve co-ordination and empower key local stakeholders to do more to address poverty, marshalling limited resources and capacity and fostering a collective determination to tackle the issue across partners.
3. They increase accountability for action as they provide measurable targets to understand if the actions set out are making a difference.



Lessons learnt and good practice from Greater Manchester and across the country can be **applied to local authorities nationwide** who are seeking to **implement robust, strategic responses to poverty**

What is a local anti-poverty strategy?

It is important to understand what local anti-poverty strategies are and what they are not. A local anti-poverty strategy identifies the key issues contributing to poverty, sets out priorities for action, is committed to cultural change, is based on multi-stakeholder partnership working, reinforces and links to existing strategies, and is focused on making a long-term difference to improve the lives of those on the lowest incomes. A local anti-poverty strategy cannot describe itself as a strategy if it is a shelved internal document or presents a list of existing initiatives.

How do we define what makes a strategy 'good'?

It is not our intention to provide a generic 'off-the-shelf' approach for local authorities to use to take a strategic approach to poverty. The twelve key elements identified by GMPA are to be used as the basis for developing and/or enhancing local anti-poverty strategies. This recognises that a local, place-based approach is needed and that existing context, such as levels of poverty and deprivation, local demographics, and the nature of existing partnership working across agencies are among a range of factors that will shape how an anti-poverty is formulated and how it will operate in practice.

12 key recommendations



- ✓ Define poverty and its drivers
- ✓ Political and officer leadership
- ✓ Focus on prevention, reduction and mitigation
- ✓ Prioritisation
- ✓ Partnership working
- ✓ Lived experience engagement and co-production
- ✓ Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies
- ✓ Governance
- ✓ Action plan
- ✓ Adopt the socio-economic duty
- ✓ Adaptability
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluation

Recommendations – A framework

An anti-poverty strategy will only be successful if it is supported by the twelve elements identified in this framework. All these elements are complementary and interdependent.

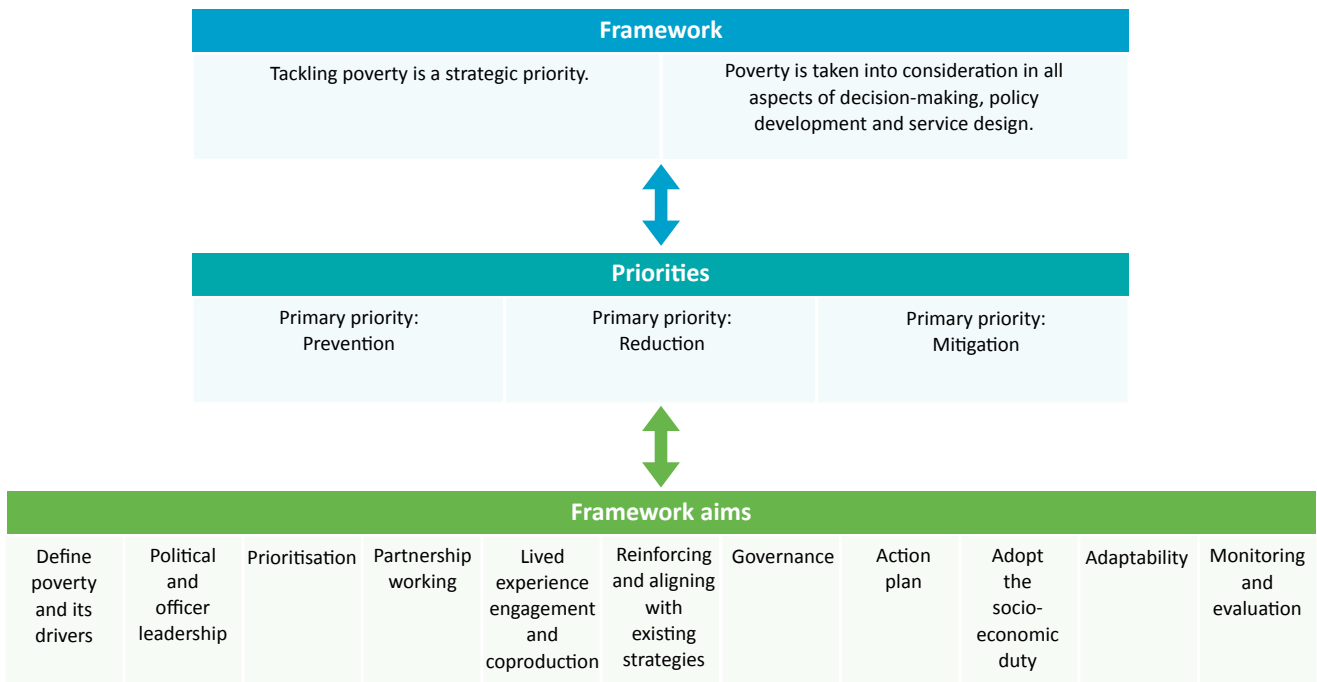


Figure 1: A framework for developing and effective local anti-poverty strategy.

1) Define poverty and its drivers

Local authorities need to develop a clear, agreed definition of poverty and its drivers.

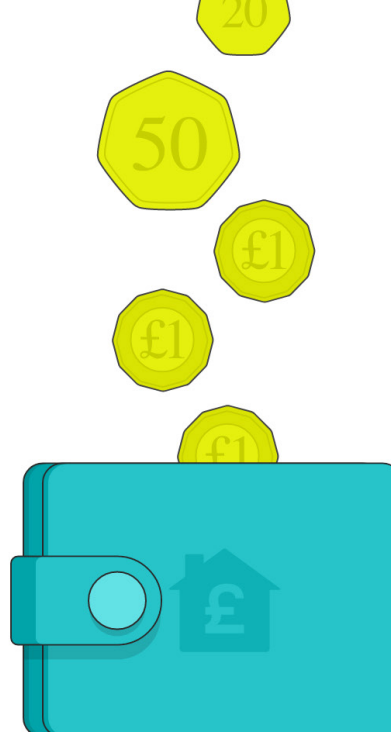
Creating a shared understanding of poverty is the cornerstone for action as it will enable both internal and external stakeholders to understand their role. This should include adopting a relative as well as absolute understanding of poverty. This means local strategic and policy responses to poverty should focus on ensuring residents can participate fully in society as well as responding to basic needs.

Alongside this, it is important to clearly identify the main drivers that limit people's ability to meet their basic needs and to participate fully in society and recognise that poverty is largely about insufficient access to adequate financial resources, i.e., a lack of money. Local authorities should focus on the three key drivers of poverty- income from employment, costs of living, and income from social security and benefits in kind. This approach means local action to address poverty needs to prioritise boosting household income and increasing access to financial resources, including taking a cash first approach to local welfare provision.

2) Political and officer leadership

For an anti-poverty strategy to be effective, local authorities need to have a permanent senior officer and political leadership to address poverty. This is crucial to drive ambition and ensure effective operational working, delivery of the intended outcomes of the strategy and strong communication with local communities on what work councils are doing to tackle poverty. Clear leadership that names poverty as a portfolio responsibility for an elected member can help build cultural change across councils, and avoid poverty being included under the catch all of 'inequality'.

Local responses to poverty need to **prioritise boosting household income** and **providing cash** over other types of support



3) Focus on prevention, reduction, and mitigation

An anti-poverty strategy must have at its core a focus on preventing and reducing poverty. Strategies should adopt medium and long-term actions.

While it is critically important that the focus of an anti-poverty strategy is on prevention and reduction, an anti-poverty strategy also needs to articulate how the council is supporting people in an immediate financial crisis through local welfare provision. Steps that councils can take include a cash-first approach to supporting people. This approach maximises dignity, choice, and control for recipients of support. It reflects that lack of income is the primary cause of financial hardship.

As part of a focus on reducing poverty, local welfare provision should also be resident-focused, identifying a clear and sustainable pathway out of poverty rather than simply offering a one-off transactional piece of support.

4) Prioritisation

Local anti-poverty strategies should not look like 'shopping lists'. A strategy should be prioritised to ensure implementation is feasible. It should clearly state what councils and local partners could and should achieve and set out clear statements against which progress can be effectively measured.

5) Partnership working

An anti-poverty strategy will not be effective without local authorities working in partnership with external partners and communities. Local authorities need to engage with local stakeholders, establishing an anti-poverty partnership group, to clarify requirements and expectations on how best to work together to achieve the objectives set out in the strategy. This is essential to share best practice and avoid duplication.

6) Lived experience engagement and co-production

People with lived experience of poverty are best placed to challenge the existing ways of working and ensure that anti-poverty efforts are centred around the needs of the community. Localities need to enable people with lived experience of poverty to fully participate in the development and implementation of an anti-poverty strategy.

7) Reinforcing and aligning with existing strategies

Given the cross-cutting nature of poverty, an anti-poverty strategy must not sit in isolation. Tackling poverty needs to be incorporated in existing strategies rather than operating as ‘ad-hoc’ to existing commitments and services. To ensure addressing poverty is a focus of everything councils do and aligns budgets, members’ portfolios, and activities there needs to be a strong focus on tackling poverty in corporate strategies, economic strategies, housing, and equality policies.

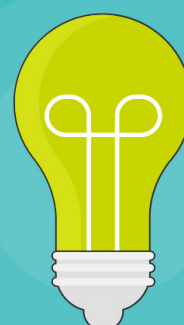
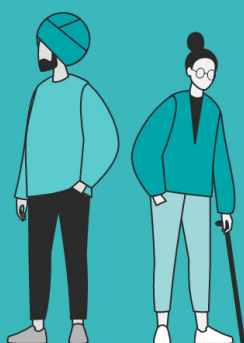
8) Governance

Good governance is necessary for an effective anti-poverty strategy. This should be both internal and external to the council, taking on responsibility for monitoring progress and overseeing the implementation of the strategy.

9) Action plan

Actions to deliver the aims and objectives of the anti-poverty strategy need to be kept under review, Accompanying an anti-poverty strategy should be a high-level action plan to increase efficiency and accountability. This should set out current and future actions, timelines, and milestones, and who is responsible for the actions. Councils need to report honestly on how they are performing against the targets and milestones, and action plans are important for refreshing the agenda.

Engaging people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage is a valuable way to challenge existing ways of working and is **crucial in developing anti-poverty policy that will lead to successful outcomes**



10) Adopt the socio-economic duty

To support the effectiveness of an anti-poverty strategy, local authorities should voluntarily adopt the socio-economic duty. The socio-economic duty contained in Section 1 of the Equality Act requires public authorities to actively consider the way in which their decisions increase or decrease inequalities that result from socio-economic disadvantage. Successive governments have chosen not to enact the duty and socio-economic disadvantage is often missing from equality impact assessments that include consideration of other protected characteristics. GMPA has been working with local and combined authorities to increase the awareness and voluntary adoption of the duty as a means of creating better outcomes for those with lived experience of poverty. Voluntary adoption of the duty enables councils to ensure the impact of decisions on poverty are taken into account at all levels and at all stages.

11) Adaptability

An anti-poverty strategy cannot “standstill”, for it to serve its purpose it should be viewed as adaptable, rather than a collection of actions that should be rigidly adhered to. Therefore, anti-poverty strategies should be continuously reviewed to ensure that they are accountable and adaptable to the needs of local communities as circumstances change.

12) Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are critical to understand whether the actions set out in the strategy are making a difference, and that they ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources and enable adjustments to be made where necessary. Local authorities should identify a clear set of metrics against which progress in addressing poverty can be tracked and develop a public-facing dashboard that highlights local poverty indicators to help understand the local population specific to poverty. People with lived experience of poverty should be engaged in this process.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the individuals, local authorities and organisations, who generously gave their time and expertise to support this research. Any errors are the author's own. This summary document and the full report are available to download at:

<https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/local-anti-poverty-strategies/>

Citation

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About Greater Manchester Poverty Action

Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) is a not-for-profit organisation that works to address poverty across Greater Manchester and beyond.

We convene and network organisations from public, private and VCSE sectors, and people with lived experience of poverty, to foster collaboration and innovation and to maximise the impact of efforts to address the underlying causes of poverty. We equip stakeholders with the knowledge they need to tackle poverty. We carry out research and advocate for changes in policy at a local and city regional level and sometimes at a national level to address the structural and systematic causes of poverty.



<https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/>

¹The case study local authority areas are: *Salford City Anti-Poverty Strategy, Rother District Anti-Poverty Strategy, East Devon District Anti-Poverty Strategy, Cambridge City Anti-Poverty Strategy, Leicester City Anti-Poverty Strategy and Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy.*

ⁱⁱ In the absence of action at a UK government level, equivalent legislation has been introduced in Scotland (known as the “Fairer Scotland Duty”) and in Wales.