

APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING POVERTY

The nature of poverty in the UK is complex; its extent far-reaching and growing. Alongside severe cuts and changes to the welfare system and cost of living increases, over recent years there has also been a significant increase in 'in-work' poverty. Holding down one job or more, no longer insulates individuals and families from the rising cost of food, fuel and other household necessities.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the nature of policy surrounding the issue has also changed. Austerity and cuts in public services have also been twinned with the withdrawal of area based initiatives and associated investment in deprived communities.

Stakeholders across the public, commercial and social sectors are increasingly seeking new and alternative ways to address poverty. For CLES, poverty can no longer be addressed through special initiatives. Instead, places need to use their existing powers and relationships to collaborate and address the issue in a coordinated manner.

In this CLES 10, we introduce ten ways in which places are addressing poverty through a place and relationship based approach.

1. Bring back the political and cultural will

In order for poverty to be tackled effectively there needs to be a collective, political and cultural acknowledgement that social growth and poverty are of sufficient import to be

a priority in addition to economic growth. In recent years the focus has been on tackling the national debt and austerity, which has been a necessity. This focus however, has meant that without intervention and support those in the poorest areas are continually becoming poorer. In practical terms poverty means: not having a choice in how to live your life, it means insecurity and it creates anxiety and fear. Without the political and cultural will for change, this situation will continue to deteriorate.

2. Understand the scale of the challenge

In order for local authorities and those with a responsibility for tackling poverty to embed tackling poverty within strategies, the scale of the challenge must first be understood. Manchester University and the Greater Manchester Poverty Action Group (GMPAG), for example, are currently working in partnership on the development of a Greater Manchester Poverty Index to build on available data, plug gaps and provide a more comprehensive reflection of levels of poverty in the city-region.

3. Fairness Commissions

Over the past few years numerous Fairness Commissions have been established throughout the UK. They bring together councillors, experts, members of the voluntary and community sector and often church members. They are non-partisan and have each come up with numerous ideas and actions for how 'fairness' can be more equally applied across the board. Collaboration and developing relationships and connections is proving to be a key means of tackling poverty in each of these places.

4. Movements not strategies

In a time of limited budgets and diminishing resources, there will not always be time to wait for a relevant public sector led strategy or action plan to tackle poverty. There are numerous organisations already seeking to make their voices heard and to highlight the current situation in the UK. The Greater Manchester Poverty Action Group, for example, is a broad coalition of public, private and VCS organisations who are pooling existing resources and expertise to tackle issues. There is a lot of positive work and action already underway - plug into relevant campaigns, rather than waiting for the next strategy or action plan.

5. Place leadership and local governance

As identified in '[Addressing Poverty through Local Governance](#)', authored by CLEES and published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), place leadership and local governance are key overarching drivers in addressing poverty. Local authorities, other agencies and stakeholders have the power to play an enabling role by putting in place the leadership, assessments, policy, strategy and partnerships to address poverty.

6. Community budgeting, co-production and public procurement

Three key ways in which local authorities can tackle poverty in a practical and institutionally 'embedded' way. Community budgeting allows partners to come together with service users within the design and delivery process. Ensuring that communities that require the greatest support are listened to. Co-production sits alongside community budgeting as public services are designed from an asset based

approach whereby individuals are viewed from the perspective of what they can contribute, rather than what they need. Finally, tackling poverty through public procurement and procuring goods and services from businesses or community and voluntary organisations based in deprived communities leads to a multiplication of spend as those bodies reinvest locally.

7. Poverty proof public services and strategies

In a similar way to the way in which public strategies have to ensure they are compliant with Equal Opportunities legislation, poverty proofing public strategies is one way of ensuring that those most in need are not neglected. This can then feed into an approach whereby public services are re-examined to ensure that there is a 'no wrong door' approach to service users. This could include assessing services as to how they support and target those most in need and whether the views of those living in poverty have been considered within service design.

8. Poverty - who pays?

Charities such as Oxfam are becoming increasingly vocal about the fact that almost £200 per household is being lost through illegal tax evasion, which is depriving the UK economy of an estimated £5.2 billion a year. This money could go a long way to take millions out of the poverty trap, through for example doubling the amount of universal childcare to 25 hours per week, giving struggling families more flexibility to work. Pressure is slowly mounting to ensure that individuals and businesses that benefit from the UK economy should pay a fair proportion of tax.

9. Economic growth alone it not enough

Tackling poverty is not a guaranteed outcome of economic growth, its part of the solution. 'Trickle up' economics demonstrate that the poorest spend a higher proportion of their income, usually in the local area. Low levels of disposable income reduce levels of local demand and therefore the poorest in our society need to start earning in order to begin putting money back into the economy.

10. Watch your language

The way in which some sections of the media have traditionally described those living in poverty defines what action or notice those in more financially fortunate positions take to tackle poverty. Over recent years there has been a rise in descriptions such as 'benefit scroungers'. Assuming that all those who are on benefits or who are in need, somehow deserve to be in their situation, is an easy way to ignore the issues. As awareness grows around the fact that increasing numbers of those who are in poverty are actually in work, many of the old arguments and attitudes no longer hold water. The way in which we use language matters as it defines how we think about others in society. As the Greater Manchester Poverty Action Group puts it, "there is no them and us - only us".

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