



CLES

the national organisation
for local economies

Community wealth building: Ireland

A guide for council members



This short briefing summarises the core principles of community wealth building – **a place-focussed approach to economic development which centres on increasing the flow, circulation and ownership of wealth** – and the important role that councillors have in supporting its adoption in places.

It also contains sources of further information and support for councillors who want to learn – and do – more to progress economic justice in their places.

Why do we need community wealth building?

As a politician you'll be all too aware of the hardships affecting the people you represent.

We are currently facing the worst cost of living crisis in a generation, record levels of inflation, increasing levels of child poverty, environmental crisis and the legacy of a two-year pandemic.

Despite the simplicity of the growth rhetoric there is nothing simple about how we address this confluence of crises at the local level.

Although the country has undergone a macroeconomic transformation in recent decades, this growth has not produced social, economic and climate benefits for many.

Traditional approaches to economic development assume that, as the economy grows, wealth for all will flow. However, economists are increasingly recognising that this often doesn't happen. Instead, wealth that is generated locally can end up bypassing local communities, with profits flowing to distant shareholders and absentee landlords.

Community wealth building is a practical response to these issues.

It aims to redirect flows of wealth, so that workers, residents and consumers benefit from the economic activity happening in their communities. This means better paid, more secure jobs and more locally rooted businesses that share the wealth they create with workers, consumers and communities.

To do this, community wealth building uses the economic power of large, locally-rooted organisations – commonly referred to as anchor institutions – such as councils, hospitals, universities and housing associations.

The way in which these institutions spend their money, employ people and use their land, property and financial assets can make a huge difference to a local area.

How does it work?

Workforce

Increasing fair work and developing local labour markets that support the wellbeing of communities.



Spending

Maximising community benefits through procurement and commissioning, developing good enterprises, fair work and shorter supply chains.



Land and property

Maximising the value that communities receive from land and property assets, including those held by the public sector.



Finance

Ensuring flows of investment and financial institutions work in the interests of people, communities and local businesses.



Ownership

Developing more local and social enterprises which generate community wealth, including employee-owned firms and co-ops.



Where is it happening?

Dozens of places across the EU, UK and US are developing community wealth building approaches.

Below are some highlights of this work.

Scotland

[Read more →](#)

Fife Council have used the intelligence they gathered about local markets through the Covid-19 grant funding process to target their own procurement expenditure towards growing and diversifying their local SME base. They have also been working with a local VCSE organisation to make their recruitment process more accessible to those who struggle to access employment.

London

[Read more →](#)

Islington Council have developed a pioneering strategy to create new workspaces that are genuinely accessible and affordable to local businesses and organisations.

Dublin

[Read more →](#)

Dublin City Council is one of the first in Ireland to adopt a community wealth building approach. Thus far, they have focussed on taking a values-based approach to recruitment, understanding their procurement spend and developing a social value framework to ensure that the values they wish to demonstrate are involved and encouraged in all decision making and policy.

Dozens of case studies exploring the work of local authorities, anchor institutions and place specific approaches to community wealth building can be found on the CLES website.

[Explore now →](#)

How can you support community wealth building in your place?

1

As a councillor

Make links with local businesses, community groups, trade unions and local organisations in your area and advocate for their involvement in the creation of economic development policy and delivery.

Consider how your local plan maximises community benefits from assets, strategic investment and regeneration initiatives.

Through overview and scrutiny

You can raise the profile of community wealth building and the issues it seeks to address and prompt consideration of new policy approaches within your council and the wider local public sector, including health organisations, universities and colleges.

Topics well suited to investigation include:

- **How does your council currently spend its money?** What proportion is spent with locally-based suppliers, with SMEs and with the VCSE sector?
- **Who does your council currently employ?** Are people from more deprived communities and marginalised backgrounds able to secure jobs and progress with the organisation?
- **What support is available for local businesses and social organisations** to establish and thrive in your area?

2

At executive level

Carefully scrutinise your corporate plans - are they really designed to deliver inclusive economies?

Embed community wealth building as a cornerstone of your local economic strategy.

Consider the inclusion of community wealth building in all SPC work programmes.

Build partnerships with local anchor institutions to encourage them to adopt community wealth building approaches and share learning between organisations.

3

Find out more

CLES is the national organisation for local economies.

Established in 1986, we are working towards a future where local economies benefit people, place and the planet. This will happen when wealth and power serve local people, rather than the other way around, enabling communities to flourish. We have an international reputation for our pioneering work on community wealth building and are recognised as the curators of the movement in the UK and EU.

Our work in supporting the community wealth building movement focuses on three main areas:

- We convene networks of community wealth building practitioners.
- We conduct research to develop community wealth building practice and influence policy.
- We offer events, workshops and tailored support to help individuals and organisations build community wealth.

We have been working in partnership with Dublin City Council since 2022, supporting them in developing their community wealth building strategy and implementation plan.

To find out more about our work, visit www.cles.org.uk or contact us by emailing info@cles.org.uk.

Free community wealth building webinar for councillors

CLES is hosting a free, one hour webinar for local politicians in Ireland and Europe on Tuesday 25 June 2024.

The session will cover the fundamentals and our latest thinking around community wealth building and will invite participants to explore community wealth building in the Irish and EU contexts and evaluate its key role in developing an inclusive economy. There will be opportunities to ask questions and delve deeper into the way the approach could work for your place.

[Find out more and book your place →](#)



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