

# How can local government protect and promote health and well-being during the cost of living crisis?

A primer to shape creative and strategic thinking from the Healthy Livelihoods Theme of the ActEarly Collaboration

## Thinking 'old and new'

Local and combined authorities can look back to the work of Fairness Commissions, Poverty and Truth Commissions and other work that focused on reducing poverty and inequality, and suggested actions that have relevance to today's situations.

There are two reviews of the work of Fairness Commissions:

- [Fairness Commissions: Understanding how local authorities can have an impact on inequality and poverty](#)
- [Agency in Austerity: A Study of Fairness Commissions as an Approach to Reducing Poverty and Inequality in the UK](#)

Find out more about the work of [Poverty Truth Commissions](#).

The Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission, which includes exemplar good actions from 10 LAs is [here](#).



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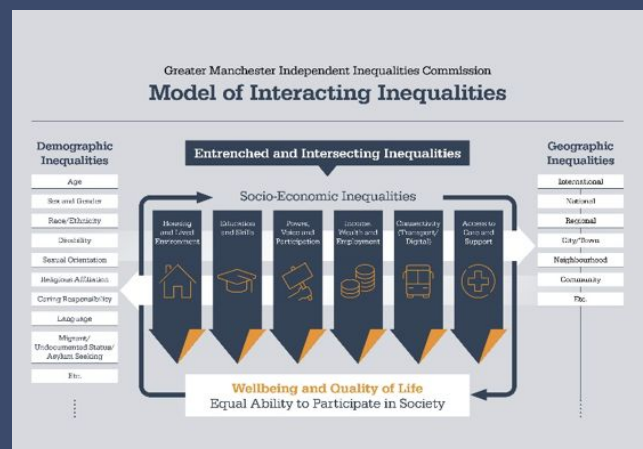
There are new economic frameworks that can be used to guide place-based policy making. For example, Amsterdam, and many other cities worldwide are using Doughnut Economics to help them develop regenerative and distributive local economies. [Find out more at the Action Lab](#).

Whatever new policies are being considered, they are probably already being implemented somewhere. Want to create a community wealth hub? Look at [Sheffield City Region's partnership with The Ownership Hub](#) supporting worker cooperatives and employee ownership.

Think innovative, but learn from others who have paved the way with thinking and action – only call for new research when the evidence is really lacking. The [Evidence Quarter](#) is a good place to start.

## Thinking Wide

Use a framework for policy making that recognizes the interactions between the 'vertical' socioeconomic inequalities of income, education and skills, power, etc., and the 'horizontal' inequalities, such as age, gender, ethnicity and place, to target entrenched and intersecting inequalities. Ask whether policies are reaching those most in need and targeting all the characteristics and sectors that constrain wellbeing and quality of life.



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## Thinking Fast and Slow

In a crisis, and with the current framework for provision of additional government funding for the cost of living crisis through the Household Support Fund, it is hard to see and plan more than six months ahead. Crisis conditions call for rapid response on fuel poverty, food poverty, homelessness and more.

BUT, wherever possible, think medium- and long-term; focus on creating resilience for future economic shocks and environmental change. For example, in Bradford the [Food Savers Network](#), with support from the Department of Public Health, brings together food aid and cooperative finance in projects where “members have dignity and self-respect, are empowered to make their own choices about good food, have opportunities to learn new skills, and can start saving in a recognised Credit Union Scheme.” Councils can develop innovative social investment schemes to purchase homes from the private rented sector, train up school leavers and others lacking work with the skills to retrofit them, and lease them as affordable, sustainable housing for those who would otherwise struggle to access suitable accommodation - creating a ‘win-win-win’ for tackling inequality. See reports from the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), the [New Economics Foundation](#) and [others](#).

## Thinking together – “nothing about us without us”

Listening to voices from the community, especially from those with lived experience of poverty and inequality and from groups who are seldom heard in policy making is vital. Co-producing policy and interventions is important but time consuming and it is hard to convene in a crisis. Establishing ongoing listening and participatory processes will ensure that local government has timely access to place-based community voices, and they can feed into strategy and decision making within the crisis as well as in the long-term.

Community empowerment is at the heart of our ActEarly approach; see our [Co-Production Strategy](#). The Bromley by Bow Centre in Tower Hamlets has some [great examples of community engagement](#).

Councils and combined authorities can develop: equality panels, community forums, citizens/people’s assemblies, participatory budgeting, reverse mentoring programs for councillors and officers. Think about removing financial barriers to participation, providing relevant training, and choosing meeting times that allow those in work or with other personal commitments or responsibilities to bring their voices to the table.

Finding out what works and for whom is a key aspect of governance and accountability when public money is at stake. Not all policies will be effective or cost effective, but learning about what doesn’t work is as important as building the evidence base of what does. Local universities, the National Institute of Health Research’s Applied Research Collaborations and Schools of Public Health, Primary Care and Social Care are good sources for advice. Building in evaluation from the start is the optimal way to learn what works so that spending can flex as evidence becomes available.

This report is co-authored by Professors Kate Pickett and Claire Cameron, leads for the Healthy Livelihoods theme in ActEarly

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Weblink:

<https://mrc.ukri.org/research/initiatives/prevention-research/ukprp/>

