



A Report into Current Anti-poverty Strategies and Work in Greater Manchester

Shannon Jones

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Introduction

The UK has been severely affected by a series of events in recent years that have risen the levels of poverty.¹ Ongoing austerity measures, the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent 'cost-of-living crisis' have placed increased pressure on low-income households. This has resulted in the poorest households [plummeting further into debt and has created debt for those that have not previously experienced this before.](#) This has led to more people needing [more intensive help from voluntary and charitable organisations for longer periods of time.](#) Regions in the North of England in particular have been found to experience [greater levels of poverty both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'cost-of-living crisis'](#) and so there are large and growing numbers of people accessing charitable organisations here today. Utilising desk-based research and informal discussions with a voluntary food aid representative, this report investigates, and reviews anti-poverty strategies and work being done to support people that are struggling financially and socially following the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing 'cost-of-living crisis'. It does so with a specific focus on Greater Manchester, an important region to explore in the North of England as many local authorities here are [evidenced to be in the top ten local authorities with the highest rates of destitution.](#) By doing so, this report aims to i) inform people about what is being done to combat poverty in Greater Manchester and ii) identify how to build on and change anti-poverty strategies and work to improve the support for those experiencing poverty in Greater Manchester.

Structure of the Report

To achieve its aims, this report is structured as follows. It begins by providing some background relating to poverty in the UK and Greater Manchester. It then investigates current anti-poverty strategies across Greater Manchester. It states some of their priorities, describes how they embed local voices in their strategies using Poverty Truth Commissions, and explores how local people with lived experience of poverty that are involved can be supported during these commissions.

¹ This report utilises Joseph Rowntree Foundation's definition of Poverty. See: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/about-us/what-is-poverty>

It then turns to explore the work of food aid providers in Greater Manchester, summarising some of the work that they do, describing how they take a 'more-than-food' approach and some challenges that they face. Finally, it focuses on examples of anti-poverty networks currently operating in Greater Manchester, summarising how they support and bring organisations together to minimise and eradicate poverty. It concludes by providing a summary of the findings and recommendations for policymakers concerning anti-poverty strategies and work in Greater Manchester.

1. Poverty in Greater Manchester

To understand anti-poverty strategies and work in Greater Manchester, it is important to first describe the scale and reach of poverty here and the factors that have impacted this. The UK is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic whereby a series of [lockdowns between 2020 and 2021 caused an economy contraction](#). Low-income working families were disproportionately affected by this as many found themselves [being made redundant, having to accept shorter working hours and being paid less than their full pay on the furlough scheme](#). This led to a large reduction in incomes for these groups. This, paired with people spending more money on energy and food (as they were spending much more time in their homes) , [caused many people to be driven into \(or further into\) poverty](#). Additionally, the UK is currently experiencing a 'cost-of-living crisis' whereby costs of everyday essentials such as food, and energy are [increasing at a higher rate than the average household income](#). This is shown to have had notable effects on those living here. [The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that](#), 7 in 10 of the poorest fifth of families went without essentials in 2022 and around 6 in 10 could not afford unexpected expenses. As a result, families were reducing their spending on food, the number of showers that they take, and the time spent heating their home.

The data in Greater Manchester shows similar, if not worse, results than the national levels of poverty following the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. [The Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(GMCA\) residents survey](#) released in July 2023 found that residents of Greater Manchester are becoming increasingly impacted by the cost of living. Almost three-quarters of respondents reported increased expenses between May 2023 and June 2023, and 54% struggled with

energy bills, exceeding the 46% Great Britain average. The rising costs of food have also impacted Greater Manchester residents as [more than one in ten households in Greater Manchester boroughs \(aside from Stockport and Trafford\) are struggling with food insecurity](#). There are also high levels of child poverty here too as around [250,000 children in Greater Manchester are living in poverty](#), higher than both the English and UK average.

2. Anti-poverty Strategies in Greater Manchester

One response to the high rates of poverty in Greater Manchester is the development of anti-poverty strategies by local councils. Within Greater Manchester, four out of the ten local councils – Manchester City Council, Salford City Council, Tameside Council, and Trafford Council – have collaborated with local stakeholders to develop distinct anti-poverty strategies in their local area. These strategies reflect a combination of shared and distinct priorities. One common theme is that all strategies prioritise the prevention of poverty.

To do this, [Manchester City Council's strategy](#) focuses on identifying those who are most at risk of falling into poverty and connects them to appropriate support. [Salford City Council](#) and [Trafford Council's](#) strategies have an inclusive approach, ensuring that local people benefit from the area's economic growth, whilst [Tameside Council](#) focuses on early intervention to prevent poverty as it aims to 'break the cycle' by providing children and young people with financial education.

In addition to the prevention of poverty, all strategies also pledge to provide more support for those that are experiencing poverty and to improve already existing support. To do this, [Manchester City Council's strategy](#) focuses on providing people with good quality, accessible and dignified support that not only meets their basic needs (food, warmth, shelter, health and hygiene) , but also ensures that those who are experiencing poverty have a good quality of life through access to cultural and leisure opportunities. [Salford City Council](#) continues to promote a local helpline (the Spirit of Salford) that signposts people to the most appropriate support, as well as ensuring to provide targeted support for refugees and asylum seekers and strengthen support for 'vulnerable' groups. [Tameside Council](#) emphasises debt

support, support for basic needs and training the community (market traders, charity workers, schools, hairdressers etc) to spot the signs of poverty and refer people to appropriate support. [Trafford Council's strategy](#) places emphasis on improving access to information and advice through the introduction of a money advice referral tool for the area and more training for their staff and volunteers to provide advice.

Outside of the prevention of poverty and the mitigation of poverty for local people, Salford City Council and Tameside Council's strategies also emphasise that the main drivers for change are the national government and try to influence governmental policies that affect those in poverty such as retaining the [£20 per week uplift in universal credit](#) and supporting the government to provide a [national strategy for tackling poverty](#).

2.1 Poverty Truth Commissions

Whilst the four anti-poverty strategies in Greater Manchester have similar overarching themes, with different approaches to how to do this, all strategies acknowledge the importance of including the voices of local people, particularly those with lived experience of poverty. To do this all strategies utilise (or are planning to utilise) the findings of Poverty Truth Commissions (PTCs) held in the four boroughs in Greater Manchester. These take the form of public commissions, underpinned by the phrase 'nothing about us, without us, is for us', where local people with lived experiences of poverty meet with local decision-makers and organisational leaders. They share ideas, listen to each other, build relationships, and propose solutions to minimise and eradicate poverty in the local area. These commissions have been especially helpful as they have inspired some of the priorities in the anti-poverty strategies in Greater Manchester.

For instance, whilst the exact details are not specified, Manchester City Council's strategy has acknowledged Manchester PTC for making [important contributions to the development of the strategy](#). Salford PTC has prompted Salford City Council's strategy to ensure that [those with the greatest need are at the core of what the strategy does](#) and Tameside Council's strategy specifically acknowledges Tameside PTC in helping to identify and shape anti-poverty in their recommendations

surrounding [housing, access to services and mental health](#). Trafford Council has not included a PTC in their recent strategy; however, they emphasise that the findings from the 2023 Trafford PTC will be included in the revised strategy in the summer of 2023 as it illustrates the [importance of embedding the voices of local people in alleviating poverty](#).

2.2 Providing Support for People With Lived Experience

The PTCs clearly show the importance of including those with lived experience of poverty in the decisions made to end and alleviate poverty. In light of this, it is important for commission processes not to be counterproductive and exacerbate or reproduce experiences of poverty for those with lived experience that are included in the commissions. People with lived experience involved in such commissions must be supported and compensated for their time to prevent this likelihood.

Most of the information and reports surrounding PTCs held in Greater Manchester do not state exactly how they compensate or support commissioners with lived experience of poverty. However, [a report following Trafford's PTC](#) mentions that those with lived experience should be rewarded properly for their time and expertise, by either being paid directly or with vouchers. [A report following Manchester's PTC](#) also mentions how the commission strongly supports the payment of people with lived experience. Outside of Greater Manchester, The Poverty Alliance in Scotland, in collaboration with independent authors, have provided other useful ways in which those with lived experience can be supported and compensated when participating in commissions. These include: enhancing accessibility of official documents; delivering digital training and IT access; appointing independent facilitators for commission support; providing a term of reference prior involvement; clarifying roles and responsibilities; offering personal development training; setting expectations through briefings; allowing adaptable involvement (e.g., remote work); providing regular reviews to reflect on experiences ; and extending post-commission opportunities such as event invitations.

This guidance highlights that those with lived experience can and must be supported and compensated in a number of ways when they provide their expertise for a

commission. These measures contribute to the prevention of poverty further for the commission as those with lived experience may be at risk of falling further into or back into poverty; especially given the current socio-economic context in the UK and Greater Manchester.

3. Food Aid Provision in Greater Manchester

The current socio-economic juncture has increased food insecurity in Greater Manchester, leading to an increased need for food aid provision. The most recent [residents' survey by the GMCA, published in July 2023](#), found that 43% of 1500 respondents living in Greater Manchester said that they 'often' or 'sometimes' couldn't afford to eat balanced meals and 38% said that they were 'often' or 'sometimes' worried about whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more. Food insecurity appears a large issue to those with children too as 1 in 3 respondents who have children said that they were 'very' or 'somewhat' worried about feeding their family over the upcoming summer holiday.

[The most recent mapping of food aid providers by Greater Manchester Poverty Action \(GMPA\)](#) shows that there has been a 97.8% increase in the number of food aid providers in Greater Manchester between January 2018 (136 providers) and May 2022 (269 providers), indicating that there has been an increased need for these services over the last few years. After scoping for food aid providers for this report and [creating a map independent of GMPA's](#), it was found that many food aid providers in Greater Manchester appear to be foodbanks that provide emergency food parcels to those in need. Many of these foodbanks are a part of the [Trussell Trust Network](#), which distribute 3-day emergency food parcels, however, emergency parcels are also provided by many smaller, independent foodbanks too. These parcels are generally accessible either through referrals from professionals working with community organisations or self-referral for individuals who receive certain welfare benefits or present a bank statement as proof of low income. Alongside these foodbanks, Greater Manchester has many food pantries too. These pantries, unlike many foodbanks, are generally accessible to anyone. Here, individuals pay a small yearly membership fee to the pantry and then also a small amount each visit for food; costs are substantially less than supermarket prices. Therefore, these

pantries prove to be accessible ways for individuals to continuously access subsidised food without needing to provide evidence of a low income (although they should not be the main source of food provision as sections 3.1 and 3.2 explore further).

3.1 A 'More-Than-Food' Approach

Although the focus of food aid providers is ensuring that people have access to (particularly emergency) food, many of these organisations try to offer more than food where they can too. This is shown in how the [Trussell Trust foodbanks in Greater Manchester](#) train staff to signpost individuals to support any problems that may have led them to use the foodbank. After an informal conversation with a representative [Crescent Food bank in Bolton](#) evidenced this 'more-than-food' approach too as they spoke of how some service users perceive their foodbank as a place where they not only obtain food, but also 'have a cup of tea and a chat'. Therefore, for some service users, the food bank is a place of comfort and socialisation where they can talk to staff and have a support network, which is just as important as practical support for people experiencing poverty. This foodbank has also run many other projects alongside their organisation that support this 'more-than-food' approach such as providing toys for children for Eid and distributing products to those experiencing period poverty. This represents the extensive work done by food aid providers in Greater Manchester to help their local community, that must be highlighted. Notwithstanding this, at the same time, it must also be emphasised that providing people with more food is not the solution to ending poverty. A more systemic change needs to occur to enforce a more long-term shift towards the alleviation and eradication of poverty in the UK.

3.2 Operational Challenges for Voluntary and Community Groups Working to Alleviate Poverty in Greater Manchester

It would be difficult not to mention the challenges and hardships that these organisations face themselves and this is one of the reasons why (in addition to food parcels not being the solution to ending poverty in the UK) these organisations

cannot be left to provide most of the welfare provision for those experiencing poverty. Food aid providers (particularly food banks) are often run by volunteers and rely on the goodwill of the public. A representative from [Crescent Food Bank in Bolton](#), for example, described how all conveners volunteer at the foodbank alongside full-time paid employment. They also referred to the rising costs of running the foodbank since they started in 2021 due to the increased cost-of-living and the increased demand for their services resulting from this, which has placed pressure on their organisation. This foodbank is not alone in facing these challenges. A [recent report, 'Running on Empty'](#), echoes how food aid providers in the North of England (Stoke on Trent and Manchester) are struggling to keep up with the demand following the recent increase in the cost of living, leaving foodbanks with shortages and having to turn people away. For these reasons, to reiterate, despite food aid providers doing an excellent job of supporting local people experiencing poverty, as this [report by the Trussell Trust](#) highlights, welfare provision cannot and should not be provided by these food aid providers alone.

4. Anti-poverty Networks in Greater Manchester

Whilst some anti-poverty organisations operate independently, there are networks of organisations across Greater Manchester that work together to combat poverty in the region. These networks differ in how they approach this challenge. Some anti-poverty networks in Greater Manchester provide data and information to stakeholders. For example, [Greater Manchester Poverty Action \(GMPA\) supports their network](#) by providing: a poverty monitor detailing statistics related to poverty, regular news and policy updates, a map of support services in Greater Manchester and links to external resources for financial support for up to 1800 stakeholders. [Their most recent impact report in 2022](#) revealed that 78% of 111 of their respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that GMPA adds value to their own pursuits of tackling poverty and that many of the organisations used information provided by GMPA to support their bids for funding.

Other anti-poverty networks in Greater Manchester encourage community development and co-production by bringing organisations and people together in one space to discuss ways to combat poverty and make strategic change. Some key

networks here doing this include the [Greater Manchester Food Security Action Network](#) (GMFSAN), the [Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network](#) (GMHAN), [Greater Manchester Housing Action](#) , [Food Solution Network – Rochdale](#) , [Tameside Food Response Network](#), [Tameside Poverty Action Group](#) and the [Oldham Poverty Action Network](#). These networks bring together those with insight or lived experience of poverty, frontline organisations working to combat poverty, public sector officers and anyone else working to find solutions to poverty. Whilst some of these networks meet, share ideas, and collectively address and work towards certain priorities, others create groups to specifically do this.

GMFSAN, GMHAN and Oldham Poverty Action Network each have a task group working on the priorities given by the network, whereby priorities are decided at regular network meetings (every 3 months). These meetings also showcase best practice. They also have another group (called a [coordination group](#) or a [foundation group](#)) that advises the task groups and supports network members. [The Oldham Poverty Action Network](#) has an additional group where those with lived experience can support one another, build their confidence to contribute within the network and be supported to enhance their skills or personal and professional development. This shows the importance of not only including people with lived experience in projects tackling poverty, but also providing them with encouragement and support so that their voices are heard and incorporated into anti-poverty work.

4.1 Level of Involvement

Whilst anti-poverty networks encourage organisations and individuals trying to combat poverty to work together, at face value it may seem like a stakeholder must have to devote a significant amount of time to be a part of a network. However, a particularly positive aspect of many anti-poverty networks in Greater Manchester is that individuals and organisations can have different levels of involvement in the network. Organisations and individuals as part of the GMFSAN and the GMHAN can simply sign up to their mailing lists to be notified about events and activities, choose to attend the network events every few months, let the network know of good practice surrounding the issues on which the network focuses, or they can volunteer

to be a part of their task group. Networks like GMPA provide information for stakeholders to use in their work how they wish.

As noted in section 3.2 of the report, some non-profit organisations do not have fulltime, paid staff and are impacted heavily by the cost-of-living crisis. This means they may not have the time or capacity to commit to a network or all network-related activities. Therefore, having choice and agency in the level of involvement is key to successful anti-poverty networks. Further, because being part of a network can involve an individual providing input and consultation, like in PTCs, individuals should be compensated and supported where possible to avoid reproducing the risk of poverty. This way more people can be involved without exacerbating inequalities, which anti-poverty work is trying to prevent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To conclude, a lot of varied work is happening across Greater Manchester since the COVID-19 pandemic and 'the cost-of-living crisis' to try and combat poverty in the region. Anti-poverty strategies in Greater Manchester try to do this through focusing on priorities that both prevent poverty in the first instance and try to improve and provide more support for those experiencing poverty. They do this with reference to Poverty Truth Commissions which are shown to be a positive tool to incorporate the voices of local people (with lived and professional experiences of poverty) in the decisions made surrounding anti-poverty. It is important that those with lived experience of poverty are supported and compensated during these commissions and the guidance by The Poverty Alliance collaboration provides a framework of how to do this well.

Despite these advances, anti-poverty strategies are only present in four out of the ten local councils in Greater Manchester. There are also many food banks in Greater Manchester that provide emergency food parcels for those in crisis. However, for a more frequent source of support for those experiencing food poverty and on a low income, food pantries can offer further resources. Food aid providers are also seen to provide a 'more-than-food' approach as they often try to support individuals with any other issues that they face where possible. Despite these features, it is important

to note that food aid providers and community organisations should not be the main point of call for local welfare provision. Food aid providers are facing huge challenges with the 'cost-of-living crisis' as they are receiving increased and overwhelming demands for their services. The focus needs to be on local welfare provisions by local government to provide money so that people can pay for necessities like food.

In addition, there are anti-poverty networks in Greater Manchester that provide information and news to their stakeholders to combat poverty. This type of networking is impactful and can contribute to stakeholder's knowledge of poverty, which they can then implement in their own work. Other networks encourage organisations, professionals performing anti-poverty work and those with lived experience of poverty to meet and work together by identifying shared priorities for future action. These networks have various levels of involvement so that organisations and individuals have the choice and agency to participate how they wish, small or large. This form of collaborative, inclusive working which includes a diverse range of people is important to anti-poverty work. The voices of those with lived experience must also be at the forefront of the discussion, reiterating that, like in Poverty Truth Commissions, they must be compensated and provided with support for this. With these conclusions in mind, this report proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- 1) To enable contextual policies informed by lived experiences, every local council in Greater Manchester should produce an anti-poverty strategy that is tailored to local anti-poverty needs and developed in collaboration with local stakeholders every few years.
- 2) To make best use of existing knowledge and networks, anti-poverty strategies in Greater Manchester should embed the findings of local Poverty Truth Commissions.

- 3) To address current pressure on food aid and charitable providers, local government should put more funding towards local welfare, including more-than-food approaches to poverty.

- 4) For stakeholders and policymakers looking to incorporate the views of people with lived experience of poverty into their work, support, resources, and compensation should be provided to them. This could appear in the form of money paid directly to individuals for their time, providing personal development training, support groups with an independent facilitator and having the agency to choose how they wish to work through flexible working options.