Greater Manchester

GM=EqAl
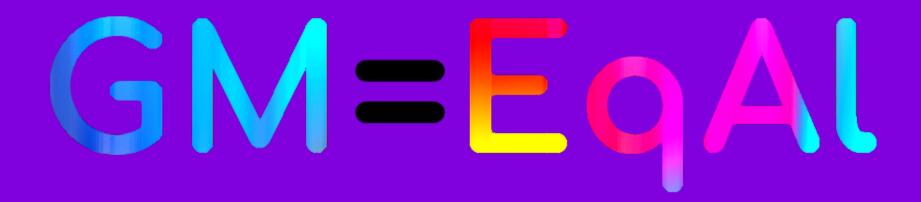
Equality Alliance

Inclusive Language Subgroup

Poverty

Preamble

- This guidance is the product of discussion and research by members of the GM=EqAl Inclusive Language Subgroup.

- It is part of a series created to help GM=EqAl members and staff be respectful and consistent in how we talk and write about the issues we work on.

- It considers different definitions and understandings of **POVERTY** and some of its closely associated terms.

- We highlight appropriate language to use when talking about poverty to ensure that our terminology is inclusive, and recommend what to avoid.

- GM=EqAl is keen for others to share and adopt our language guidance, and welcomes dialogue with partners in order to keep evolving the documents along with our understanding.

- This guidance has been robustly generated but does not claim absolute authority on any topic.

What is poverty?

- There are many definitions of poverty – partly because it varies a lot from place to place and across time.

- In some contexts, poverty means living one day at a time, unable to meet basic survival needs such as food, shelter or clothing.

- In the UK in 2023, it is about not having enough money to meet what our society considers a minimum standard of living, such as being able to participate in recreational activities, afford healthy food, furnish your home, or send your child on a school daytrip.

- While rooted in economic hardship, poverty often coexists with lower levels of education, poor health and worse access to services, and can include a sense of powerlessness and the experience of being stigmatised.

- No matter how it is defined, poverty is most often a situation people want to escape, and that all societies need to work to eliminate.

bit.ly/whatspoverty

What is poverty?

- Anti-poverty work in the UK is almost always concerned with ensuring that people have enough money to flourish, not just to meet their subsistence needs.

- Two conflicting but commonly-held beliefs among the British public are that 'real poverty' no longer exists in the UK, and that poverty is inevitable.

- Part of the task of anti-poverty work is to increase public recognition that:

  ➢ Alongside material deprivation, social isolation and exclusion are a key aspect of poverty

  ➢ Certain social groups within society are at greater risk of poverty

  ➢ Poverty is rooted in the failure of social and economic structures, rather than flaws in individuals

bit.ly/3M8i9J3

Measuring poverty

There are different approaches to defining and measuring poverty. The most common measures in the UK are:

- **Relative poverty**, where household income is below 60% of the current national median* income. Around 20% of the population live in relative poverty.

- **Absolute poverty**, where households have less than 60% of the median income as compared to a rate fixed in 2010/11 that only changes in line with inflation.

Reports usually state whether income has been calculated before (BHC) or after housing costs (AHC) are deducted. bit.ly/3OkO37I

At lower thresholds (at incomes below 50% or 40% of the median), people are said to be living in '**deep**' or '**very deep**' poverty. The deepest form of poverty is **destitution**, where people lack the essentials needed to eat and stay warm, dry and clean. Around 2.4 million people (3.6% of the population) were destitute in 2019. bit.ly/3o4c3Br

*The median is the income that exactly a half of households earn more than, and half earn less than.

Measuring poverty

- The Government is considering adopting the **Social Metrics Commission (SMC)** poverty measure, which looks beyond income at all material resources and assesses extra costs e.g. those due to disability and childcare. It also includes people sleeping rough and uses a smoothed poverty line to avoid potentially misleading year-on-year changes. bit.ly/2UU3STX

- Each year the JRF refreshes its **Minimum Income Standard (MIS**) - the level of income required to access the goods and services the public think you need to meet material needs and participate in society. They analyse how many households are below MIS, and why.

- The word 'deprivation' is often used alongside poverty. People are said to be 'deprived' when they lack something they need - whether that's lack of food, clothing, fuel, shelter (**material deprivation**) or lack of social connection (**social deprivation**).

- A range of approaches are needed to measure deprivation and poverty, including income, socioeconomic status, debt, educational level, healthy life expectancy etc. All are just 'indicators' that can't simply be equated with poverty. bit.ly/3BptpMl

- Some proxy measures of poverty, such as the **Index of Multiple Deprivation**, focus on geographical area characteristics, not individuals

The Socio-Economic Duty

- The Socio-Economic Duty was originally Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, alongside the equality duties that we are familiar with. However, when they came into power, the Coalition Government took it out.

- In 2015, the Conservatives also removed the child poverty elements of the Child Poverty Act 2010, the other strand that had been intended to help the public sector build a fairer UK.

- Public authorities, including some Greater Manchester councils, are choosing to adopt the duty voluntarily. This means formally incorporating poverty and **socio-economic disadvantage** in equality impact assessments, equality plans, and the broader decision-making process and strategies.

- The duty doesn't make poverty an additional protected characteristic, but recognises the interplay between all nine protected characteristics and **socio-economic status**.

Poverty is multi-dimensional

Poverty has many causal factors, and they interact in complex ways. An intersectional approach - looking at who has power in society - is central to understanding how poverty operates, and to developing strategies against it.

➤ Stigma and discrimination due to class, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality, religion or parental status (or even poverty itself) can all affect people's ability to escape from poverty.

➤ Some communities are more likely to have jobs and working patterns associated with **in-work poverty**, e.g. the in-work poverty rate for Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers in 2021 was 34%, against 11% for White workers.

➤ Poverty rates are much higher for households which include a disabled person or an informal carer.

➤ The poverty rate for single pensioners is almost double that of couples.

➤ The gap in young people's educational attainment tracks parental income across all stages of education, illustrating the potential for poverty to become **generational** without support and mitigation. bit.ly/3pJGygF

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Language considerations

Since unequal power relations are a key driver of poverty, **people with lived experience (PWLE) of poverty** should be in the front seat when it comes to defining problems and developing solutions, and should set the agenda when it comes to language.

It is important to frame PWLE poverty as active agents, and avoid value judgments, such as phrases that equate low income with failure, or imply that working hard is the main route out of poverty.

Instead of:	Say:
• Warm Space • Providing the resources people need • In need / less fortunate / poor • Financial security / success • Economic mobility / independence • Work ethic • Supporting families • Vulnerable / disadvantaged / underprivileged groups • High risk / at risk groups	• Community Living Room • Providing the tools people need • Low income / with lived experience of poverty / experiencing poverty • Financial stability • Economic opportunity • Personal responsibility • Strengthening families • Groups that have been economically marginalised • Groups placed at increased risk of [outcome] / experiencing disproportionate risk of [factor]

bit.ly/nesbitt-johnson, bit.ly/fentonpoverty

Language considerations

- Only refer to socio-economic status when it is necessary and relevant.

- Avoid words that community members do not use to describe themselves [keeping aware that if communities use pejorative terms about themselves it may be as a form of resistance, or due to a normalisation of the stigma and negativity they face].

- Avoid simplifying the diversity of advantages and needs within a group, by not using a single characteristic (e.g. low income) to define them.

- When possible, use specific metrics e.g. level of educational attainment, occupation or income.

- Rather than 'high' or 'low', consider using percentages (e.g. income bracket) that make it easy to determine where on a range an individual falls.