

fund communities (not policing)

**Visions from Greater Manchester
based community groups in
response to the annual rise in
council tax to fund policing**

January 2026



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INTRODUCTION: A CASE FOR DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Fifteen years of austerity, compounded by an ongoing cost of living crisis, have left an indelible mark on Greater Manchester. Many residents are living increasingly precarious lives, struggling to make ends meet amid rising costs and the sustained erosion of public support. Today, more than one in three children and young people in Greater Manchester are living in poverty, placing the city-region well above the national average and underscoring the scale of hardship faced by families. It is against this backdrop that the residents of Greater Manchester are once again being asked to pay more through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) proposed increase to the police precept, to raise an additional £14.4m for policing.

The effects of austerity are visible not only in household poverty, but in the long-term hollowing-out of local public services. Nationally, local authority spending power fell by around 24 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2020 and, despite subsequent funding uplifts, remains well below its 2010 level. These reductions have not been evenly distributed: councils in northern regions, including the North West, have experienced deeper and more sustained cuts than many of their counterparts elsewhere.

This pattern reflects not only geography but the structure of local government finance itself. Funding reductions have fallen most heavily on councils serving populations with higher levels of deprivation and social need. Several Greater Manchester local authorities fall within the most deprived deciles nationally, leaving the city-region particularly exposed to the cumulative effects of these cuts. As a result, stark inequalities increasingly coexist side by side: rapid urban redevelopment and an expanding corporate skyline sit alongside rising homelessness, food insecurity, and unmet need.

Over this period, many of the services that once provided everyday support and social infrastructure have been significantly reduced or lost altogether. Spending on youth services in England has fallen by more than 60 per cent since 2010, with severe consequences for youth provision across Greater Manchester. Libraries have closed or seen their opening hours cut; mental health services—particularly for children and young people—have struggled under rising demand and long waiting times; and food banks have become an increasingly routine feature of daily life for many residents, stepping in where the state has retreated.

This sets out only a small part of the much wider and deeper context in which the proposed police precept increase must be understood—and helps to explain why, in recent years, the public has repeatedly voted against the increase when consulted. The public makes its opposition clear in spite of shameless efforts to nudge survey respondents toward supporting the increase, only for their views to then be overridden by the Mayor and the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

While large parts of the local state have been hollowed out over the past 15 years, the public has repeatedly been asked to pay more for policing. Although police budgets experienced reductions in the early years of austerity, policing has been subject to far less severe and sustained cuts than many other public services and, in recent years, has seen funding protected and increased through central government settlements and council tax precepts. This divergence reflects a broader direction of travel: a steady expansion of policing alongside the erosion of social infrastructure, with punitive and carceral responses increasingly used to manage the social harms produced by poverty, inequality, and disinvestment.

Any proposal to further expand police funding must also be considered in light of the continued and enduring harms associated with policing in Greater Manchester. Despite the Chief Constable's explicit denials that institutional racism exists within the force, patterns of racist over-policing persist across multiple domains, including stop and search, use of force, everyday police contact, and police pursuit. All of this harm is exacerbated by ongoing failures of accountability.

There is likewise little evidence that the force has meaningfully addressed the serious failings in the treatment of women—particularly in its handling of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and safeguarding—documented in the Baird Inquiry. Moreover, as a police monitoring group based in the city-region, we continue to receive regular reports of harm caused by police contact, underscoring the gap between official assurances and lived realities.

Beyond these documented harms, a more fundamental issue must be confronted: despite sustained investment in policing and imprisonment, these systems have demonstrably failed to resolve the social problems they are increasingly asked to manage. The statistics from the GMCA's own reports are damning: for example, sexual offences recorded by GMP went up 9% this year, whilst the 'solved' rate of sexual offences went up only 1%. Poverty, mental ill-health, gender-based violence, housing insecurity, and social exclusion are not problems that can be solved through enforcement, surveillance, or punishment. Yet even as social support and public provision have been withdrawn, further resources continue to be directed towards policing, with predictable and harmful results. This reflects not a lack of evidence, but a persistent political commitment to approaches that are incapable of addressing the harms they claim to tackle

Despite the scale of austerity and the sustained erosion of public provision, Greater Manchester remains rich in groups and organisations doing vital work to support people, address harm, and build collective wellbeing across the city-region. Often operating with limited resources and under increasing pressure, these groups provide forms of care, advocacy, and support that have been systematically withdrawn by the state. Their work demonstrates that alternatives to punitive and carceral responses not only exist but are already being practised—frequently by those closest to the harms produced by poverty, inequality, and long-term disinvestment.

The contributions that follow come from five such groups - the Greater Manchester Living Income Campaign, Manchester Women's Justice Collective, Migrant Justice Manchester, Kids of Colour, and a local community centre. Working across related but distinct areas, each of the contributions takes the proposed police precept increase—estimated at around £14.4 million, or roughly 1.6 per cent of the overall GM policing budget—as a starting point. Withholding this increase would not cripple police finances; for community organisations operating under conditions of sustained underfunding, however, the same sum would be transformative. Redirected even in part, it would create the space to invest in care, support, and social infrastructure, and to test different approaches to addressing harm—approaches that have been systematically crowded out by the steady expansion of policing. These examples are not exhaustive, but illustrative. Taken together, they offer a glimpse of how things might be done differently at a moment when the existing model is clearly failing. Despite frequent appeals by Burnham and the GMCA to the idea that 'we do things differently here' in Greater Manchester, public spending decisions have yet to demonstrate that this is more than a slogan.

Greater Manchester Living Income Campaign

What is GM Living Income?

Greater Manchester Living Income is a campaign that aims to create a Living Income in Greater Manchester where people would have enough money to afford life's essentials, and would have access to genuine and compassionate employment support. Our aim is to demonstrate that a more adequate and less conditional social security system would help more people to flourish.

This might be those currently receiving Universal Credit or those living without access to any financial support as they have 'no recourse to public funds'. There would be higher levels of support for those who have caring responsibilities or face additional barriers to work because of health problems or disabilities.

Living Income Pilot

We are campaigning for a Greater Manchester Living Income pilot, for 200 households for 2 years across Middleton, Tameside, Oldham and Manchester. We want to show that this works and learn how it can be expanded to everyone who needs it in Greater Manchester.

Who are we?

Our coalition came together in 2022, and is made up of 4 organisations from across Greater Manchester: New Economics Foundation, Mama Health and Poverty Partnership, Middleton Co-operating, and Our Agency CIC.

Why?

The inadequate social security system sets people up to fail. For us living in Greater Manchester, we know what we need so that we can have fulfilled lives. The idea of guaranteeing people a minimum level of financial security is one with long historical roots and has often been seen as a tool of justice and emancipation. In this spirit, we want to create a 'minimum income guarantee' that no one could fall below. We believe this will provide the foundation for people to build towards a better future, where life is about thriving, not just surviving.

Context

During the Covid-19 pandemic, an unprecedented number of people ended up relying primarily on the state for financial support. Alongside those placed on the furlough scheme, the number of households on Universal Credit almost doubled in the space of a year, peaking at over five million. The inadequacy of the basic rate of support, which poverty campaigners had been highlighting for years, suddenly received widespread attention and was promptly increased by £20 a week. There was also increased interest in ideas such as a Universal Basic Income and a Minimum Income



Guarantee. But as the pandemic subsided, Universal Credit was cut back down to its previous rate and more ambitious proposals for an overhaul of social security were muffled by the return to 'business as usual'.

In Greater Manchester, many people are living in highly deprived areas. In 2022, the child poverty rate in the UK was 29% - in eight of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester the child poverty rate was above this national average. This deprivation has been compounded by punitive welfare policies such as the two-child benefit cap, the sanctions regime and delays in payment for Universal Credit, and no recourse to public funds (NRPF) for those seeking asylum.



The Campaign

Our vision for a Living Income in Greater Manchester has been co-created with over 100 community members from a range of backgrounds, with a wide range of life experiences. Through a series of workshops, together we decided on the levels of payment, the type of support and the approach needed to ensure people can fulfil their potential.

In addition to working with communities, the proposed pilot is based on research led by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). Their detailed policy proposal sets out how the current social security system could be redesigned on a national scale to create a hard 'income floor' that no one could fall below.

The table shows the full costs of running the pilot for 200 households across 24 months:

Duration	Cost Type	200 households
24 months	Payments	£4,258,000
24 months	Administration	£150,000
24 months	Evaluation	£110,000
24 months	Total	£4,518,000

**Greater Manchester Living
Income Campaign**

As we can see from the above figures, 14.4 million pounds (the proposed increase to the police precept) could cover the total costs (including administration and evaluation) of a Living Income pilot for well over 600 households for 24 months. This would massively expand the impact of the pilot. Alternatively, it could allow us to run our intended pilot for 200 households for 24 months, and distribute the remaining funds (a transformative sum of around 10 million pounds) to address a range of other community needs over the same period.

What next?

As we grow the campaign, we are building power, relationships and developing leaders in our local communities to secure commitments from local decision makers and funders. The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, has also previously demonstrated his support for this campaign. Speaking at our launch event in May 2025, he said:

'At the earliest possibility [...] I would want us to bring forward the country's first Living Income pilot'

This reflects the fact that the region – as well as experiencing high levels of deprivation – has been at the forefront of regional devolution, particularly around employment support for people with more complex circumstances.

We want to prove that we can make Living Income a reality in Greater Manchester. Redirecting money from a huge policing budget and reinvesting it in support of this pilot would make this possible, lifting millions of residents out of poverty and representing real, transformative change.

Find out more and sign up to the campaign on our website - gmlivingincome.co.uk



Greater Manchester Living Income Campaign

Investing in Real Justice for Women

Injustice

Women are at the heart of family and communities. Yet over the last 15 years women and communities have suffered extreme disinvestment. Austerity and privatisation have had severe impacts on community provision and statutory services. Women have not only been affected as individuals but across the whole system that surrounds them as mothers and carers within the family unit. Women are having to make up for reductions in services and increased costs of living, and are too often pushed into precarious situations such as staying with abusive partners, going without food or heating to feed their children, and giving up rest and health care to provide unpaid care for relatives. The list of hardships and sacrifices women are forced to endure goes on and on.

The reality is that when it comes to the ways in which policies, strategies and budgets are set and delivered by the government, when the aim is saving money, women **ALWAYS** come off worse. There is so much that we could write about for this piece but we choose to focus on domestic abuse, an unfortunate reality for so many women. This is all the more important given that current police-led approaches to domestic abuse are failing women, even when presented as 'cutting edge' policing.

One in four women experience domestic abuse in their life. It is estimated that two women are killed by partners or ex partners each week and up to three women a week commit suicide due to domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is largely hidden and often goes unreported, with specialised domestic abuse organisations estimating that only 20% of victims report to the police. This means, first, that reporting figures do not reflect the extent of the problem, and second, that policing does not prevent harm from taking place but is instead turned to in the aftermath.

Even the police don't believe that they can do what the policies say they should. Use the QR code to watch this short clip, which asks the question: Can Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPO) keep women safe? – Channel 4 News.



Redefining Justice

Given all of the limits to policing and prison as responses to domestic violence, we need to invest in alternative strategies; we must identify ways of investing in women and communities that challenge these long-standing issues, and bring about real change and harm prevention in ways that police and punishment have failed to do.

For generations women have been told what exists constitutes support and meaningful intervention. But women need support that understands and responds to their lives as girls, women and mothers — and that centres on delivering justice, real justice. Not justice rooted in punitive responses and punishment via the criminal legal system, but justice that recognises a woman's humanity: the nuance of her life, the needs she has, the care she provides, the violence she survives, the barriers she overcomes, the work she puts in, and the care that she needs.

When more money goes directly into communities, women can develop solutions for women. Local community organisations have shown that by creating safe spaces for girls and women experiencing abuse, with a focus on building them up and on reducing isolation, women can both survive and resist domestic abuse.

Manchester Women's Justice Collective (MWJC) has started to build this work in Greater Manchester. We are a collective of women who not only live with and survive these policies and frameworks, but also engage with statutory services and mainstream organisations. These experiences have brought us to a clear truth: existing systems are responsible for significant harm and failure. As a result, we have moved beyond them to ask what justice for women looks like — and how it can be delivered. Creating spaces where girls and women can build individual, family, and community power is what works, as evidenced by grassroots and community-led projects across Greater Manchester, many of which are part of our collective and are already building alternative infrastructures that respond, support and intervene.



Investing in Justice

The MWJC is a network of many amazing groups, organisations, and projects. These include local grassroots groups, self-organised well-being spaces for women to connect, as well as vital crisis support spaces for women who need to flee violence or access support for mental health, addiction, or other personal circumstances.

Here are just a few examples of some amazing community organisations* delivering life changing work in Greater Manchester:



ENDEAVOUR



MASH



SAHELI



These, and so many projects like them across Greater Manchester, have been developed by, in, and with communities of women to support some of the most marginalised women in our city region. They are established projects and can demonstrate the value and impact they have in women's lives. This includes both hard outcomes, such as safe housing and healing, and equally important soft outcomes that go hand in hand with care-based approaches to support.

**the community organisations listed were not involved in writing this piece*

£14.4m is a **HUGE** amount of money. It could fund a wide range of vital spaces for girls and women, have an appreciable impact on the lives of women experiencing violence and harm, and further strengthen an already brilliant ecosystem — ranging from grassroots spaces for women to come together in community, to high quality therapeutic support for women to heal and grow, and refuges and community projects that support women in moments of crisis and through growth and resistance to violence.

Some examples of how this money could be spent include:

Small scale organisations - £1m could be made available to provide local women the finances to create social and wellbeing groups in warm and inviting spaces to reduce social isolation, build intergenerational links, and peer support. 100 such groups would receive £10k for the year to cover room hire, refreshments and resources.

Medium scale - £3m could fund the salaries of 30 therapists (£50k) and 42 community based support workers (£35k), providing women with the support they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

Large scale delivery services - £10m could provide 10 refuge and community type projects with £1m running costs each.



We aren't online but you can find out more about MWJC by scanning the QR code or you can get in touch by emailing sitesofresistance@gmail.com



Migrant Justice Manchester

Housing For All Refugees in Greater Manchester

Context

Migrant Justice Manchester is a small grass-roots collective that works in solidarity with the migrant community in Manchester, particularly those experiencing homelessness.

We all know that housing is an issue which affects us all. People across Manchester are living in fear of eviction, paying rents they can't afford, or trying to recover from illness in damp, unsafe homes. A home should mean safety, access to food and healthcare, rest, work, community and learning opportunities. It should not be something that can be taken away by policies, landlords, bailiffs or systems that treat some lives as less worthy than others.

For over a year, refugees - many of whom have fled war, persecution, climate catastrophes, humanitarian crises and genocide - have been forced to sleep in tents in Manchester city centre. Community members have tried repeatedly to find safe, adequate housing and have been met with barriers, lack of support, and ultimately eviction.

Barriers faced by refugees in accessing housing

While waiting for a decision on refugee status, asylum seekers are barred from work, study, opening a bank account, and renting. Once refugee status has been granted, government policy allows only 28 days to secure housing, open a bank account, apply for benefits and find work before asylum support is removed. These tasks are made nearly impossible by Hostile Environment policies, digital exclusion, language barriers and widespread discrimination in housing and employment. The government recently chose to end a pilot that gave people 56 days before being evicted from their Home Office accommodation.

The majority of community members MJM works in solidarity with are denied homelessness relief duty having been deemed 'not priority need'. This means it is up to them to find private housing, while sleeping rough with limited or no support from the state.





One of the main barriers in accessing housing is lack of funds for a deposit and rent advance. A large majority of those fleeing war, genocide and other unimaginable horrors arrive in the UK with little or no money or possessions. Finding work while homeless is nearly impossible, and meeting daily needs without access to cooking or washing facilities is expensive, so saving up for a deposit may take months or years. Within the Manchester City Council area, there are no government bodies or charities offering financial support for rental deposits.

Cost Analysis

Migrant Justice Manchester operates with a budget of around £2000-£5000 a year, depending entirely on donations from individuals and small organisations. This money is used to attempt to go some way to restore dignity to those who have been let down by the state, including by:

- Paying for emergency accommodation for refugees and migrants at particular risk of harm from homelessness, for example single women, those with serious illnesses or injury.
- Buying sleeping bags, tents and other essential supplies for those sleeping rough.
- Destitution fund - £50 in cash for anyone we meet with no recourse to public funds/still waiting to receive Universal Credit.

As a collective, we do not believe that this work should be necessary. We advocate for three changes in national and local government policy that would allow those seeking sanctuary in Greater Manchester to build secure, fulfilling lives here:

1. Extension of asylum support to allow adequate time to secure housing and work/education after receiving refugee status.
2. Financial support for rental deposits for those leaving asylum support without the means to pay this (as is currently offered by many local authorities, but not Manchester City Council).
3. Automatic provision of temporary accommodation and support securing permanent housing for any refugee experiencing homelessness (as is currently the case for care leavers and certain armed forces veterans).

No More Deportations

Around 2500 households are granted refugee status within Greater Manchester each year. The average cost of a rental deposit and rent advance is around £1000. Temporary accommodation (in shared houses and hostels, rather than the more expensive hotel accommodation) costs on average £100 a week. This means that over the course of a year:

- **£1m would provide all households granted refugee status in Greater Manchester an extra four weeks of temporary housing to allow time to carry out the necessary steps to begin their lives in the UK.**
- **£2.5m would provide all households evicted from asylum support in a year in Greater Manchester with funding for a rental deposit.**
- **It is difficult to estimate the number of refugees experiencing homelessness in Greater Manchester, and we believe that this number would be drastically decreased by the above measures, but an additional £1m would provide 500 refugee households experiencing homelessness 12 weeks temporary accommodation.**

The total figure of £4.5m is less than one third of the proposed increase in the policing precept, and would end street homelessness for those who seek sanctuary in Greater Manchester hoping to build safer lives here and participate in the life of the city. **This still leaves just under £10m to provide emergency housing support for others or resources to respond to other support needs across Greater Manchester's communities.**

Housing for all. Community = Life

These ideas are our tentative demands for future policy and allocation of funds. More ambitiously, we advocate for an end to the system that deems most people experiencing homelessness 'not priority need' and therefore ineligible for real support from the state. We advocate for an end to landlord profiteering, and local authority buy-back of council housing. We also advocate for investment in psychosocial care provision, supporting all unhoused people, many of whom suffer the effects of severe trauma, to live happy and healthy lives. These policies would not only enable Manchester to live up to its status as a 'sanctuary city' for refugees, but also benefit all communities affected by the housing crisis.

In this reimagined world, for a collective like Migrant Justice Manchester, working in solidarity with refugees and migrants would no longer have to focus on trying to rectify the failings of the state. Instead, it would look like welcoming people into our city with meals and events, exchanging culture and ideas, building bridges where there is division, and spreading community joy.



Housing For Everyone

Young People Deserve Beautiful Lives

Kids of Colour is an anti-racist youth work organisation based in Greater Manchester. We create spaces for racialised young people to feel supported, validated and celebrated. We advocate for young people and our communities, challenging racism, building collective resistance and solidarity. Our work with young people brings us more deeply into their lives, as well as the lives of their families and communities: communities that we both work and exist within. As a result, as well as sharing in their joys, we have significant insight into the challenges young people are forced to navigate and survive each day.

State Violence in Greater Manchester (GM)

Young people in GM are navigating the racism of policing and the criminal (in)justice system every day. Through our work, we are witness to how young people are surveilled, harassed, brutalised or even killed by Greater Manchester Police (GMP). Everyday interactions with GMP (if young people survive) - as well as with multi-agency services working under the guise of 'support' - often force young people through the criminal (in)justice system. Over the years, this reality has led us to focus on the collective punishment of young people in GM, identifying Manchester Crown Court as a site of harm. Between 2021 and 2024, our tracking shows that 29 young people were sentenced through collective punishment cases like Joint Enterprise to a total of 450 years in prison across 6 cases. This is a reflection of the shameful world we are building for our children, one with a carceral heart.

The investment in this state violence, including the £2.5 million super courtroom refurbishment, is taking priority over life giving, healing infrastructures. We should be shocked, but we know the reach, racism and violence of GMP, council services, and the Crown Prosecution Service knows no bounds, and drives approaches to young people. Sadly, it is getting worse. State, institutional and media narratives surrounding young people dehumanise them, and racialised young people especially are constructed as violent, unruly, and dangerous. Year after year, increased investment in policing is



justified through narratives that cast young people as a ‘threat’ to a public they are rarely treated as part of. But policing doesn’t prevent ‘crime’, or reduce harm. It doesn’t build safe communities, or make lives beautiful, and for some, it takes lives away. Financial investment in policing, and investment in the idea that all services have a role in police work, is not just a threat to young people in the present, but takes us further and further away from investing in what we need to build beautiful lives for young people.

The Beauty Young People Deserve

Whether in health, housing, education, children’s services, or youth and play provision, there are complex frameworks, policies and funding models that surround young people. But rarely at the core of these, are we speaking about how we make young people’s lives beautiful. Rarely is that the focal point and intention of our ambitions, even though it could be the root of healing and harm reduction. Increasingly, many of these services also take on the work of policing, adding to the restriction, criminalisation, and judgement of young people. What young people deserve and need is quite simple and should drive all we build. We want all young people to have:

- All they need to live healthy lives at a base level. Stable housing, access to food, employment for them or their families, inclusive healthcare, settled immigration status.
- Educational environments that respond to their interests, personalities, needs, culture, histories, and that are spaces of belonging and expression, supporting them through life.
- Lives that are valued for who they are now, with daily opportunities for joy, creativity, and participation, without financial barriers—rather than being treated primarily as future workers.
- Connection to place and community, with time to be in nature and to build relationships—with peers and across generations.
- Dependable adults who build relationships grounded in care and trust, so that when young people need help they are met with support rather than judgement or punishment.
- Spaces and people—from youth workers to mentors—who recognise young people’s strengths and build their confidence, self-worth, and sense of possibility.
- A society rooted in solidarity, one that understands young people’s mistakes as a collective responsibility, and that responds to harm through accountability and care within community, rather than exclusion.



Investing in Beautiful Lives

In this spirit of imagining, here is one vision for what £14.4 million could make possible in one year:

- £2 million could fund ten organisations similar in size to Kids of Colour, enabling at least one well-resourced, culturally grounded youth organisation in each Greater Manchester borough.
- £2.5 million could fund ten youth and play organisations, each delivering weekly provision for young people aged 6–18.
- £2 million could fund 10,000 young people to attend a two-night residential at outdoor education centres such as Ghyll Head, offering opportunities for confidence-building, connection, and time in nature.
- £1 million could cover the purchase and running costs of ten 16-seater minibuses—one per borough—supporting safe transport to residentials, events, and activities, and reducing barriers created by limited or unsafe travel options.
- £2.25 million could fund 50 per cent of the running costs of a specialist youth mental health organisation such as 42nd Street, significantly expanding access to timely, non-stigmatising support.
- £1 million could be invested in Youth Bank-style initiatives, enabling young people to design, lead, and fund projects and activities that reflect their own interests and priorities.
- £1 million could fund counselling training for 200 professionals, equipping staff in schools, youth clubs, and children's homes with therapeutic and conflict-resolution skills.
- The remaining £3.6 million could provide the estimated 6100 young people in care across Greater Manchester with around £600 per year to pursue activities aligned with their own interests—such as music lessons, sports memberships, and other skill- and confidence-building opportunities—removing financial barriers to participation.

We firmly believe that these interventions would be far more effective in tackling the social problems that policing is always incapable of solving.



Being Community Centred

Community facilities include: community centres, youth clubs, community services, social centres, and multi-purpose community sites. These sites are essential elements of community infrastructure providing front line services and activities at the point of need. They create environments for belonging, relationships, respite, and remove barriers to opportunity and support. Community facilities have always been integral to people's lives, and prove to be more so for those who are most marginalised.

Yet Greater Manchester (GM) has the lowest number of community facilities proportionate to population of any combined authority area in the country, over a third less than the national average. The Manchester city region has the lowest number of proportionate facilities in GM, under half the national average. During the last 15 years of cuts to public services, the cost of living has increased to extortionate amounts and households are not only hit by rising food costs, but also record increases to energy prices. Many people are still being forced to choose between heating their homes or feeding themselves. When we combine the reduction in public spending, front line services, community infrastructure and the increased costs of living, no one can deny the dire situations residents of GM are forced to survive, but couple that with the rise in unemployment in the city region and it is hard to know how people can escape the growing deprivation they are facing. No one anywhere should be surprised that one in ten people living and working in GM are claiming universal credit to survive. Ill and disabled people have been sacrificed in the latest round of policy changes to disability benefits, which we have all been warned will force people into dangerous circumstances. This is all the more frightening following reports that millions of households aren't claiming benefits they're eligible for with the main barriers to claiming being awareness, complexity and stigma; barriers that can be broken in community settings which provide information, advice and guidance, and casework support.

So at a time where over a third of children in Greater Manchester are living in poverty and in wards like Harpurhey over 35% of households are living in deprivation, how can residents of Greater Manchester consider the increased profits of private corporations, national government austerity measures, and the local increases of council tax to increase funding to policing as anything other than the cost of greed?

In times like the ones local residents are currently surviving, community centres provide the last line of defence and support that those navigating the sharpest end depend on to survive.

A Real Manchester Case Study

In North Manchester there is a neighbourhood project which was founded in 1977 by local residents, with the support of the local authority. The project was established to support the community in a way that is community-centred and driven by people that were from the local area. In 1982, the project opened its community centre and has operated from it ever since. In 2018, following austerity measures this organisation and seven others lost their core funding, forcing redundancies and threats of closure. However, volunteers fought hard for the organisation's survival and stepped in to keep the centre open. With sheer determination the organisation has been rebuilt to what it is now: a fully timetabled community centre, where the project and organisations based within the building are working with around 4,500 individuals a year.

The project delivers a range of services, and activities and provides opportunities for people of all ages. They partner and collaborate with other organisations and groups to ensure a wider and accessible offer that responds to the needs of local residents, the majority of which are underpinned by systemic inequalities.

Core Delivery Areas:

- Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Services
- Free Food Cafes and Emergency Food Packs
- Children and Young People's Provision
- Community Engagement and Wellbeing Programmes
- Community Health Programme
- Accessible Physical Activity Programme
- Green Space Activities
- Community Events and Celebrations
- Personal and Social Development Activities and Opportunities
- Warm Hub

15 other community organisations deliver their own services and activities from the centre as part of the timetable or through regular advertised sessions. These activities range from creative sessions, wellbeing, physical activities, health, tenants support, training provision, mental health support, young people's programmes, and cultural activities. The project works closely with 20+ other organisations that range from campaigns, grassroots collectives, community organisations and statutory services, to stay in contact, support each other and - where aligned - collaborate to deliver activities and provision that benefit local residents.

How £14.4m could be invested in communities

It costs just under £200k per year to run the community centre at its current capacity, but in an ideal world there would be more funding for staff and project costs bringing the budget to around £300k.

Now of course no grant-funded organisation currently will ever, could or should ever depend on one funder for 100% of their income. But it made sense to see how many similar projects could be funded with £14.4m.

The answer: 48! 48 community facilities could be fully funded for 12 months with less than 2% of GMP's annual budget!

But let's go one level deeper in thinking about how organisations vary in size and needs and more realistic grant funding models. Let's break down £14.4m into three different levels of funding grant amounts: small (£15k), medium (£35k) and large (£70k). How many organisations could be funded then?

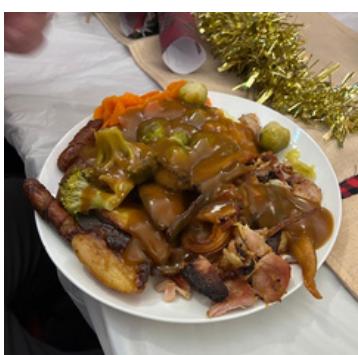
Small grant fund £2.4m: 160 organisations

Medium grant fund £4.5m: 128 organisation

Large Grant fund £7.5m: 107 organisations

The results are shocking. **1.6% of GMP's annual budget could provide 395 community facilities with funding to staff and deliver services and activities to local communities across Greater Manchester over a 12 month period.**

Resourcing communities with this type of supportive infrastructure prevents criminalisation as people are responded to at the point of need, and receive care and resources that allow them to get by rather than being pushed into crisis or survival mode.



CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING WHAT PUBLIC MONEY CAN DO

This collection has highlighted just a small fraction of the powerful grassroots work already taking place across Greater Manchester. There are many more organisations, initiatives, and forms of collective care that could have been included, each responding to harm, inequality, and exclusion in creative and effective ways. What is clear is that this work is already happening—often despite sustained underinvestment and increasing demand.

With meaningful and proper investment, such work could be strengthened, stabilised, and allowed to grow. The organisations featured here demonstrate what becomes possible when resources are directed towards care, prevention, and collective wellbeing rather than enforcement and punishment. Far from being speculative or abstract, these proposals are grounded in lived experience and in practices that already exist. They show that alternatives to the current model are not only imaginable, but achievable.

In bringing these contributions together, this collection has sought to engage in the practice of dreaming and envisioning brighter futures. Such work is essential if we are to break out of the limits imposed by the status quo and resist the idea that existing arrangements are inevitable. These visions matter. They hold power precisely because they are ambitious while remaining rooted in reality. Things could be different—and given the scale of harm produced by current approaches, they must be. At the same time, this collection raises serious questions about how public spending decisions are made, and whose voices count in that process. Decisions about policing and taxation are routinely taken behind closed doors, in spaces far removed from the communities most affected by their consequences.

Meanwhile, the public's voice—clearly and consistently expressed through consultation processes opposing further council tax rises—has been repeatedly disregarded. This year's consultation further undermines confidence in the process, with a survey design that limited meaningful opposition and appeared to be structured to secure approval rather than to solicit genuine public views. This democratic deficit is not incidental; it reflects a system in which decision-making is insulated from scrutiny and accountability.

The reality is that policing, and Greater Manchester Police in particular, has caused significant harm and remains ill-equipped to resolve the deep social problems it is increasingly tasked with managing. Continued reliance on policing and imprisonment represents not only a failure to learn from evidence, but a refusal to invest in approaches that could genuinely reduce harm over the long-term. The visions offered here point instead towards systemic, community-driven change—change that addresses root causes rather than responding punitively to their consequences.

NPMP will therefore be present at the Police, Fire and Crime Panel meeting, and we call on members of the public to join us. For too long, the GMCA and GMP have operated with insufficient scrutiny. That must change.

This work is intended not only for this year, but for those to come. While this collection focuses on the police precept and a relatively modest increase—around 1.6 per cent of Greater Manchester Police's overall budget—it demonstrates what might be possible if we were prepared to think differently about public money.

We anticipate that the GMCA will point to technical constraints, arguing that precept funding cannot simply be redirected to community initiatives. But this is precisely the moment for long-term thinking and political leadership. What has been done here with this collection could be replicated with many other organisations across Greater Manchester, and in other policing areas across England. We hope this collection encourages others to reimagine how public resources might be used, and to join us in building alternatives that are democratic, caring, and capable of producing real change.

For more information about our work including previous work on the policing precept please visit our website npolicemonitor.co.uk or follow our Instagram @npolicemonitor



fund communities (not policing)

Greater Manchester Living Income Campaign

Kids of Colour

Manchester Women's Justice Collective

Migrant Justice Manchester

Northern Police Monitoring Project