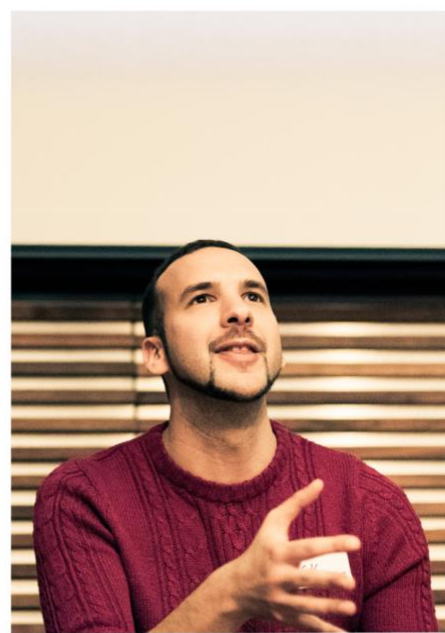


INVOLVING LONDONERS IN A BASIC INCOME PILOT



A briefing by Cleo Goodman, Project Director and co-founder of Basic Income Conversation and Zack Polanski, Green Party Member of the London Assembly
March 2023



City Hall Green
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Basic
Income
Conversation

FOREWORD

We needed a basic income long before the pandemic hit. A series of makeshift solutions from Government only proved the need for a social settlement that guarantees real economic security in times of crisis.

Now the chorus of support for a basic income is stronger than ever. In November last year, 285 politicians and campaigners united to urge the Government to launch pilots in all four nations of the UK.

The Mayor of London was among those signatories, and his recent support for a pilot in London is a testament to the work of dedicated Londoners over many years.

But there is much more the Mayor can do to deliver a basic income that could lift more than 100,000 Londoners out of poverty, as his own research shows it could.

A basic income pushes the boundaries of what's possible, just as the founding of the NHS did in the aftermath of the Second World War. Achieving that requires not just a benevolent Government, but a powerful collection of social forces pushing in that same direction. It requires widespread understanding and organisation among the public, a policy design that has been properly tested, and a community of expertise established over many years.

In other words, a basic income will not, and should not, come from a top-down approach where politicians decide it's time. It will come from grassroots movements demanding an alternative to the economic system, which is badly letting them down.

When I was elected two years ago, I made a promise to Londoners to amplify the voices of

people who go unheard or unseen. This research is a step forward for that agenda.



It makes the case for citizen engagement from the outset of a London pilot and sets out how to consult communities on principle and design. It also advocates for a truly universal pilot to build on the existing evidence from other trials and show most clearly the benefits to Londoners on the ground.

The Mayor should be driving this conversation forward. Communities like Grange Big Local in East Finchley have stepped up to the plate, pioneering work on a locally led micro pilot, but they need our support.

This year, I will be convening Londoners in City Hall to take the basic income conversation to the next stage. I invite the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Debbie Weekes-Bernard, to join us and see for herself the momentum for this idea: one whose time has come.

Zack Polanski AM
March 2023



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1 A BASIC INCOME IN LONDON

London, as one of the economic powers in the world, has a unique opportunity to move the global basic income debate forward with a pilot.

As the Mayor’s Economic Development Strategy for London states: “The latest research shows that inequalities in income and wealth ultimately damage economic performance.”¹ London, as a city with high levels of poverty and inequality, provides a powerful test bed for redistributive policies like a basic income.²

The London context is unique. As a basic income looks closer to becoming a reality than ever, both globally and in the UK and Ireland, London needs to begin to seriously engage with the debate.^{3 4} This involves democratic engagement with Londoners that aims to understand and act on the high levels of support for the policy as well as research that examines a basic income for London.⁵

A basic income pilot in London would be a locally and globally significant project. It would show the world that one of the oldest economic centres can democratise wealth as well as redistribute it, and demonstrate City Hall’s ability to drive innovative, forward looking policymaking. It would send a powerful message to citizens that they are trusted and worthy of investment.

It would provide a rallying point for democratic economic development that reaches people who are usually excluded from the process. And perhaps most importantly it would put more cash in people’s pockets at a time when more and more of us are reaching crisis point.

The Mayor’s research on basic income shows even a low level basic income would cause dramatic reductions in poverty.⁶ Any policy that

could cause leaps in progress towards alleviating poverty and the cost of living crisis should be explored as a priority in the wake of the pandemic.

1.1 WHAT IS BASIC INCOME?

A basic income is a regular cash payment that every individual within a geographically defined area receives without conditions.

A basic income has 5 characteristics:

1. Regular - So you know the next payment is.
2. Cash – It’s money rather than vouchers so you can spend on whatever you need.
3. Individual - It is paid to each person on an individual basis and not to households.
4. Universal - Everyone gets it.
5. Unconditional - It is paid without a requirement to work or to demonstrate willingness to work, there are no strings attached.⁷

A basic income is a policy that can have a wide range of objectives and must be carefully designed to meet those specific objectives. The level of payment, the way it is paid for, and the way payments are issued are decisions that need to be made based on the purpose of the policy. This purpose should be decided collectively and democratically.

This aligns with the Mayor of London’s own Economic Development strategy that intends to “maximise community participation [and] active citizenship”.⁸



1.2 WHAT SHOULD A BASIC INCOME PILOT IN LONDON LOOK LIKE?

Basic income is a policy that has high levels of support from the general public, as data I gathered from YouGov shows, so it poses an opportunity to start conversations about how we support people and how we want our economy to work.⁹

Gauging Londoner’s opinions on a basic income pilot not only encourages those conversations, it also focuses on a clear and achievable outcome. If Londoners are supportive of a basic income pilot, the next conversation is about how a pilot should be designed to benefit them the most.

A community-led pilot built in this way would be a truly democratic approach. It would be an opportunity for Londoners to tell their stories and the stories of their community and for this to inform policy making in a meaningful way.

The evidence from the pilot would be more accurate if the pilot design and evaluation takes into account the local context and community expertise. The data collected will be more deeply understood by the wider public if the experiences of pilot participants are told in an accessible, story driven manner that truly represents the community.

A basic income pilot project in London should be connected to the long term strategy for the city. It should be clear what evidence will be generated by the pilot and how this will be taken into consideration.

A universal basic income pilot in London would

be a remarkable contribution to the global body of evidence on the policy.

To generate the best possible evidence on the impacts of basic income the pilot should be as universal as possible. This usually would mean giving everyone within a geographic area the basic income payments to understand how the participants behave collectively.



More than twice as many Londoners back a universal basic income as a way to build financial security after the pandemic than oppose it, according to 2022 data from YouGov commissioned by Green London Assembly member, Zack Polanski.¹⁰

Fifty per cent of Londoners say they support a universal basic income (a policy that makes sure everyone has an income, without a means test or requirement to work) with just 22 per cent opposed.



2 WHY BASIC INCOME?

As a policy that many support and most cannot resist talking about, basic income represents several key opportunities. There is a high level of public support for a basic income because it would provide economic security and reduce poverty, leading to potential improvements in our health as a population and savings for the NHS.

People see basic income as a way of avoiding economic crises by putting cash in people's pockets and boosting the economy. People are convinced by the evidence that basic income has a positive impact on society as a whole and want this evidence gathering to continue through the process of implementation. People support the benefits a basic income would provide working people: financial support through turbulent times, a fund for training or education and a top-up of hard working people's salaries.

People support the design of the basic income system because it does not disincentivise work through means testing or the withdrawal of support for people with disabilities due to invasive and unfair Fit For Work assessments. The efficiency of the basic income system would reduce form-filling, long waiting periods, people falling through the cracks and being left with nothing, and the cost of administering the current, ineffective system. A basic income would return our welfare system to the safety net that it was intended to be.¹¹

A universal basic income must be taken seriously by any progressive politician. The popularity and relatively high levels of awareness of the policy can be used to bring these conversations to people who are usually excluded.



3 BASIC INCOME IN THE UK

To date, the governmental exploration of a basic income in the UK has largely been by devolved and local governments.

London can build on the work done by the Scottish and Welsh Governments to design a pilot that contributes significantly to the global body of evidence. If the pilot also took inspiration from the demonstrations in the USA and the impact mayoral influence has had on the success of those projects, it could succeed at putting the voices of Londoners at the heart of evidence based and forward thinking economic strategy.

3.1 SCOTLAND AND WALES

The Scottish Government provided four local authorities, Glasgow, Edinburgh, North Ayrshire and Fife, with £250,000 to explore the feasibility of Scottish basic income pilots. This work produced two pilot models that would produce groundbreaking evidence on the community level impacts of two levels of basic income.¹² The feasibility study showed that these pilots were affordable, would produce valuable new evidence and recommended that they go ahead.

However, it also found that there were political barriers to these pilots, they required primary legislation to ensure no one would be financially worse off due to participating in the pilot due to the loss of benefits or other income. The feasibility study found that the DWP, HMRC and central government would not cooperate with their plans.

The Scottish basic income feasibility study is significant because it showed what barriers there are to basic income pilots in the UK, and provided an outline of a ‘best practice’ basic

income pilot that would show the impacts of a truly universal basic income.

Despite these difficulties in Scotland, after the 2021 election, the First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford announced that the Welsh Government would run a basic income pilot. The pilot is targeted at young people leaving the care system. For a year from 1st July 2022, everyone who has experienced the care system in Wales, that turns 18 years old, will be invited to participate in the pilot. This is expected to be around 500 people. Participants will receive £1600 a month from the month following their 18th birthday for 24 months. This is thought to be the highest level of basic income tested anywhere in the world. HM Revenue and Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions and central government are not cooperating with this pilot either.

They have confirmed that the basic income payments will be classed as income. This means they will be taxed and will make participants ineligible for certain means tested benefits. The level of payment has been set high enough to ensure that, despite the basic income being classed as income and being taxed, everyone is financially better off due to participating in the pilot. Participants will keep all the income they earn from paid work, after tax, throughout the pilot.

The Welsh pilot will produce the first primary evidence on basic income in the UK. It will help us understand how a basic income impacts people in the UK and will investigate how it will impact care leavers specifically. All of the data gathered during this pilot can be used to develop basic income policies and changes to existing policies, particularly those targeted at care leavers in Wales. The pilot is not universal – not everyone in a given geographical area receives the payment – so it is limited in what it can tell us about basic income. It will tell us nothing about the community level effects



which are thought to be a key pathway to many outcomes of a basic income.

Nonetheless, the Welsh basic income pilot shows that pilots are possible in the UK. It has used targeting and high levels of payment to overcome political barriers. This shows that a bold and purposeful pilot design can get around these barriers.

The Welsh basic income pilot is not the last stop for basic income in the UK, but the first. The lessons learnt will be invaluable, but the targeted nature of the pilot strengthened calls for a *universal* basic income pilot. It is time for London to invest in these projects and find a place at the heart of the debate around this transformative policy.

3.2 A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME PILOT

A basic income is paid to everyone. This means it would impact us both at community level and as individuals. We would each behave differently as a result of receiving our basic income and this would affect the way we behave collectively.

Replicating the universal nature of a basic income in the context of a pilot is challenging. A pilot by nature selects a specific group of people to give the basic income that can be used to infer what would happen if a universal basic income was implemented. Many pilots choose to target the basic income at a particular demographic, for example, the care leavers who are participating in the Welsh pilot and the long term unemployed people who were involved in the Finnish pilot.^{13 14}

The final frontier for basic income pilots is to examine the community level effects. The Scottish feasibility study work outlines how this can be done using 'saturation sites'. Selecting an area with a population of the right size for

the analysis of the pilot to be statistically significant and with a demographic profile comparable to the entire population. Everyone in this area would be provided with a basic income. This can then be compared to a control group, a much bigger group of people who are not receiving basic income payments. The control group is used to make sure the outcomes measured are a result of the basic income payments and not other factors.

Providing everyone within the geographic area with the basic income would mean the community level effects could be studied and the true impact of a basic income better understood. This is the approach taken in the ongoing trials in Catalonia, where the population of two whole villages will receive the €800 payment in addition to a geographically diverse sample across the region.¹⁵

A pilot in London should also be universal. This could be a whole postcode, street or tower block. This would be the best test of the potential impact of a basic income in London and the first universal trial in the UK.

3.3 COMMUNITY-LED BASIC INCOME PILOTS

Community-led basic income pilots commit to including the communities involved in the project in the decision-making process. This is crucial to ensuring the project is done with the community and not to them. Working effectively with the community allows them to decide if a basic income pilot is something they support in principle. People are experts on their own communities and are best placed to identify any context specific considerations that need to be made.

The evaluation of a basic income pilot is complex. Working with the community



throughout helps researchers develop quality evaluation methods. A high level of trust and awareness within the community is crucial to receiving a high response rate from participants.

Local knowledge is required to check the assumptions the evaluation is based on and make sure the right questions are asked to identify key impacts. The development of appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods is the role of the researchers, and the input of the community informs this work.

There is an obvious issue with basic income pilots; only a relatively small number of people are part of the group receiving the basic income payments. This is necessary as the pilots are creating a controlled environment where one of the objectives is to identify any unforeseen negative consequences. But as the intervention being tested is a cash payment, there is a clear potential for resentment and conflict.

Involving the communities and examining whether they find it acceptable for a basic income pilot to go ahead despite it directly benefiting only a small number of people in the local area is crucial. It is more ethical than making the decision on their behalf based on assumptions about how they would feel about it, whether by going ahead with a pilot or dismissing the idea. It is likely that community support for a pilot will be based on the assumption that it will lead to a basic income being rolled out universally if the results are positive. This should be a condition of the pilot.

“Universal Basic Income, UBI, I think this is an idea whose time has come... A culture of zero hours, casual hours, people doing three jobs and then they’re spending every hour worrying because they can’t pay their rent, so they’re living on the edge and that damages people’s health.

“A universal basic income will put a solid foundation beneath everybody so that they can have a life with security and stop worrying about everything.

“We’ve come out of a Covid pandemic, but we’ve got a mental health pandemic now, because so many people are living so close to the edge all of the time and we’ve got to take that away and give them much more security in their everyday lives.”

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, May 2022¹⁶



4 INVOLVING LONDONERS

We have established that:

- There is a high level of public support for a basic income, with 50 per cent of Londoners in support compared to only 22 per cent against.¹⁷
- A universal, community-led pilot in London would be a ground-breaking project and a valuable contribution to economic development in London.
- Basic income can open up conversations about social security and economic policy making with a diverse range of people that are usually excluded from these conversations.

There is very little investment in the community action that drives the basic income movement. This work largely comes from the grassroots which once again speaks to the high levels of support people have for the idea.

However, the dependence on unpaid work and lack of precedent for economic policies establishing themselves from the bottom up means the usual voices of politicians and commentators are louder than those of the people who stand to benefit most.

A London-wide consultation on basic income would return social security and economic policy debates to their fundamental purpose, improving the opportunities of everyday people. Listening to people's current experiences helps us identify the problems.

4.1 HOW TO INVOLVE COMMUNITIES

Leading the work

Getting the work off the ground requires an

investment of time from people already involved in work on basic income. Depending on the starting point within a specific community this might be a politician, an organisation or residents that are based locally, or indeed an external group.

For the work to be representative of the community, local people should be given the resources they need to lead the work and make decisions. Some of this will come in the form of coordination support, perhaps from paid staff working for a local organisation or one that specialises in basic income. The community will need access to information and training about basic income, both the technical aspects of the policy and how to talk to people about it. There should be a budget allocated to compensate people committing their time to the consultation activities and leading the project. This should be a key consideration for the project and is where the Mayor of London could support this work. People should not be excluded from participating because they cannot afford to.

Not all members of the community will be able or willing to play an active role in the work. This is particularly true of people who are sceptical of or opposed to a basic income or work on it in the community. The work should factor this in to ensure these people are still engaged and their opinions are still represented.

In this section some structures for leading this work are outlined.

Community working groups

A community working group is a panel of local people and people with relevant expertise who are able to represent the local community and enable basic income to happen. This can be as large or small as required and the roles may be voluntary, part of someone's job or compensated as part of the project.



Responsibilities of a community working group:

- Oversee the work on basic income, making sure key decisions align with the wants and needs of local people
- Support a community consultation asking people how they feel about basic income, if they support a micro-pilot in their local area and how they think it should be run.
- Sharing learning and experience with other similar groups and projects
- Building and nurturing the relationships in the local area

Membership of the community working group could comprise some or all of:

- Residents
- Representatives from local organisations and community groups, including tenants unions, faith groups, Citizens Advice bureaus and residents associations
- Local politicians such as Councillors, Assembly Members or MPs
- Potential partners for the pilot project such as researchers or staff from key organisations
- Community leaders

Membership of the community working group should be as diverse and as representative of the community as possible. If the working group is made up of volunteers, the workload should be manageable and they should be provided with support and strategic oversight. Membership of the community working group should be expected to shift and change throughout.

Community consultation

A micro-pilot would have a significant impact on the lives of everyone involved. This extends beyond the participants and control group to

everyone in the community and potentially across London. Therefore, it is only right for the community as a whole to be consulted on the potential project. A community consultation outlines the key components of a basic income micro-pilot that the community should be aware of and the methods for assessing the opinion on these factors.

Community consultation could be used to assess:

- Whether a significant number of people want the project to go ahead at all
- What people think the impact of the basic income payments will be on those who receive it
- How people think a pilot project would impact the local community
- How a pilot can be designed to best reflect the community's priorities and concerns, and ensure it is as fair as possible
- How a pilot should recruit participants and keep the wider community informed of progress
- How the pilot should be communicated to people outside the local area

A community consultation here is a range of activities that collect data on each of the above that can be used to produce a robust case for or against a local micro-pilot as well as specific design features.

Broadly speaking, there are two audiences that should be consulted on the project: the people with the power to influence the project and those who it will affect. The team who led the Stockton pilot in California referred to these two groups as the 'grassroots' and the 'grasstips'.

The grassroots group are the people on the ground - the local residents and community organisations. The grasstips are people who have influence and a platform - the politicians



and senior leaders of influential organisations. The grasstips groups will be listened to and may have the power to make or break the project.

It is crucial to get a sense of what both of these groups are thinking, feeling and saying in order to build a project that serves the community, and that is not pushed forward or halted by factors that are outside the community's control.

These audiences can be broken down into:

- **Residents** - Residents should be consulted and actively involved throughout every step of the process. They should be able to carve out the roles they want in the running of the project. Anyone brought in to run an aspect of the project should be listening to the feedback of residents.
- **Local Organisations** - Local organisations have access to and knowledge of people in the local area which can be used to consult the community on the project. They could also provide services crucial to the running of the pilot, such as providing benefits advice to participants. Local organisations will have a unique understanding of the community and insights into how the project should be designed.
- **Politicians** - Politicians have an audience that can help engage residents. They also have access to resources and influence that others do not. They have unique access to information about the potential political barriers to progress and can share the opinions of political parties and elected officials. Their insights are relevant and should be considered but should be weighted only as one voice in a conversation between many people.
- **Potential Funders** - Gaining the

investment to deliver the project is a crucial factor. The community involvement, ethics and principles of the project should not be compromised for the sake of bringing a funder on board. The members of the community should have access to potential funders so there can be a transparent discussion about their interest in the project.

To ensure an appropriate spread of people are consulted, tools like a power mapping analysis can be used. A power mapping analysis involves plotting people that should be consulted onto a map with two axes. One axis is power, going from least powerful (grassroots) to most powerful (grasstips).

Participants should place people on the axis based on how much power they hold in the community, this might be through an influential job, elected position, access to significant amounts of wealth or resource, a public following etc.

The other axis describes how supportive people are of the local work on basic income, from least supportive to most supportive. People may need to be situated on this axis based on assumptions until it is possible to ask them directly.

This exercise ensures that a cross section of the community are consulted on the project. It is at its most effective when a diverse group of people with a range of personal and professional experiences and networks are invited to contribute to the exercise.

Consultation can take various forms, with different resource requirements and advantages:

- **Public events** - Information about the project and how to get involved can be shared at public events that anyone in



the local area can attend.

- **Open invitations** – This might be a website, a social media account, a mailing list, a physical noticeboard or a regular event.
- **Direct invitations** - The named people identified on the power analysis such as locally elected politicians, leaders of key local organisations, faith leaders, and head teachers should be contacted directly to ask them for their opinion on the project.
- **Surveys** - Paper and online surveys will be sent around to collect information from as many people as possible. These will help us understand how supportive people are of basic income and the project.
- **Door knocking and stalls** - To share information about the project with a wide audience of people likely to have varied opinions.
- **1:1 interviews** - 1:1 conversations with key people in the community will give us a detailed understanding of these people's thoughts about the project.
- **Workshops** - Workshops and focus groups with residents will help them learn about basic income and micro-pilots and allow us to learn from them
- **Roundtables** - Bringing together groups of key people to discuss the project and the findings of the Community Consultation as we go.

Networking between groups doing similar work

Projects similar to this have been run around the world and increasingly, in the UK and across London. Therefore, it is prudent to ensure any groups leading this kind of work are in touch with each other so they can share resources, experiences and lessons with each other. There are also individuals and organisations with expertise that can be applied directly to

projects in London.

Relationships between active groups working within London and across the UK can be crucial to supporting the people delivering the work, particularly if this is largely delivered by volunteers. Peer support can be motivating as well as practically helpful.

A steering group of representatives from community working groups that meet regularly would be a useful structure to facilitate this. This group would set its own agenda of activities that support the work locally and create shared resources that reduce the work that needs to be unnecessarily duplicated in each local area.

Paid work

It is important to consider the role of paid work in these kinds of community-led projects. There are activities that are not appropriately or sustainably managed by people in volunteer roles, including legal obligations such as data protection and safeguarding. There should be funds available to provide fair work opportunities to people who are leading this work.



5 NEXT STEPS

This report has set out the case for a community-led, universal basic income pilot for London. Starting by asking residents of this city what they think of solutions embeds respect from the outset and gives voice to the expertise they have in their own lives. A truly universal pilot widens the potential impact, and builds on the evidence base established to date.

Inviting people to consider a pilot and how it could be designed will allow us to build a project where communities play their role in securing long-term prosperity for London. That must be the next step for us in City Hall.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Please get in touch if you have any comments, thoughts or suggestions.

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This report sets out my views as an individual Assembly Member and not the agreed view of the entire Assembly.

For press enquiries, please visit: london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-members/zack-polanski

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