

## **Urban Inequality and the Retrenchment of Urban Services in the Age of Austerity**

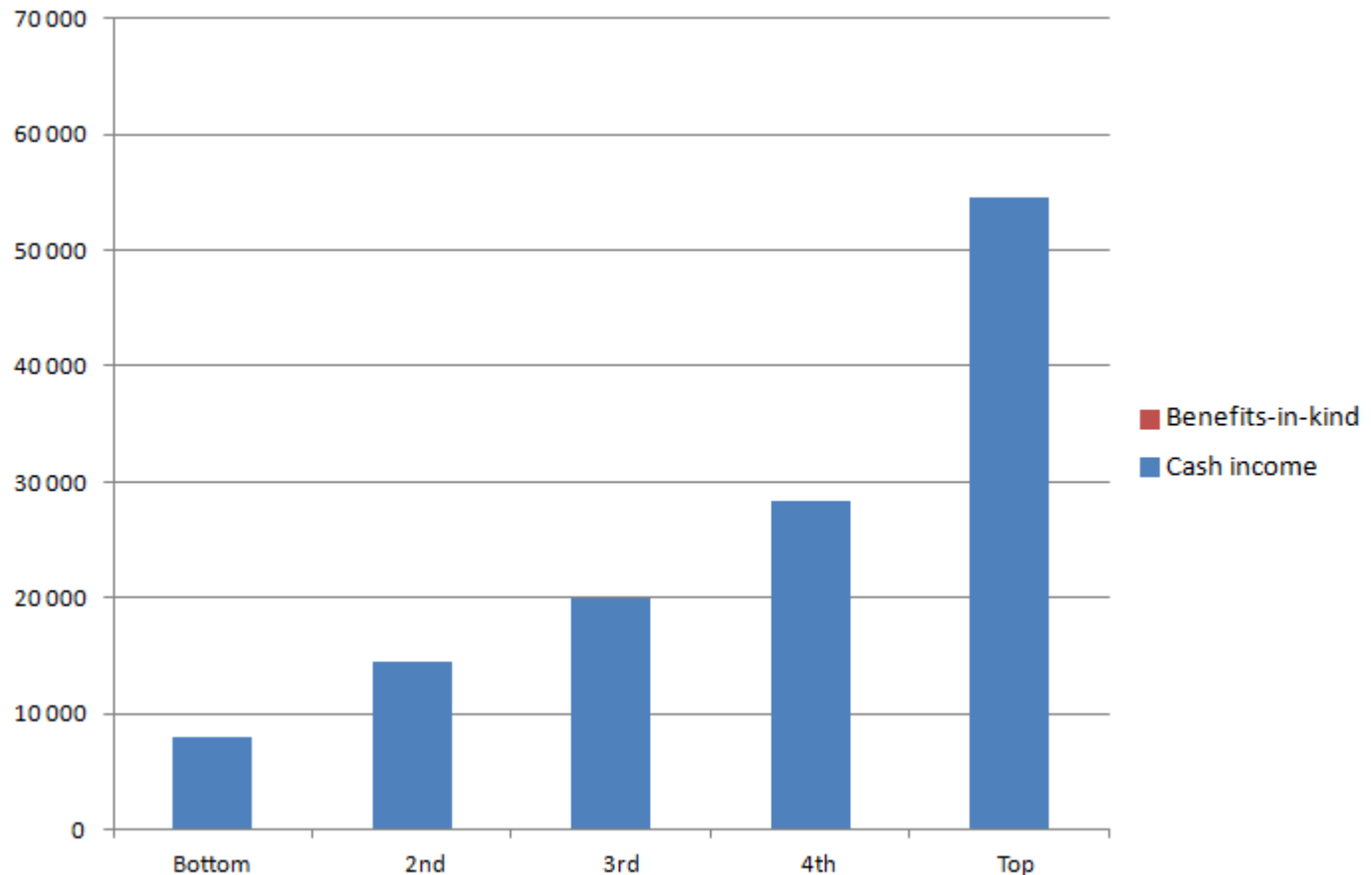
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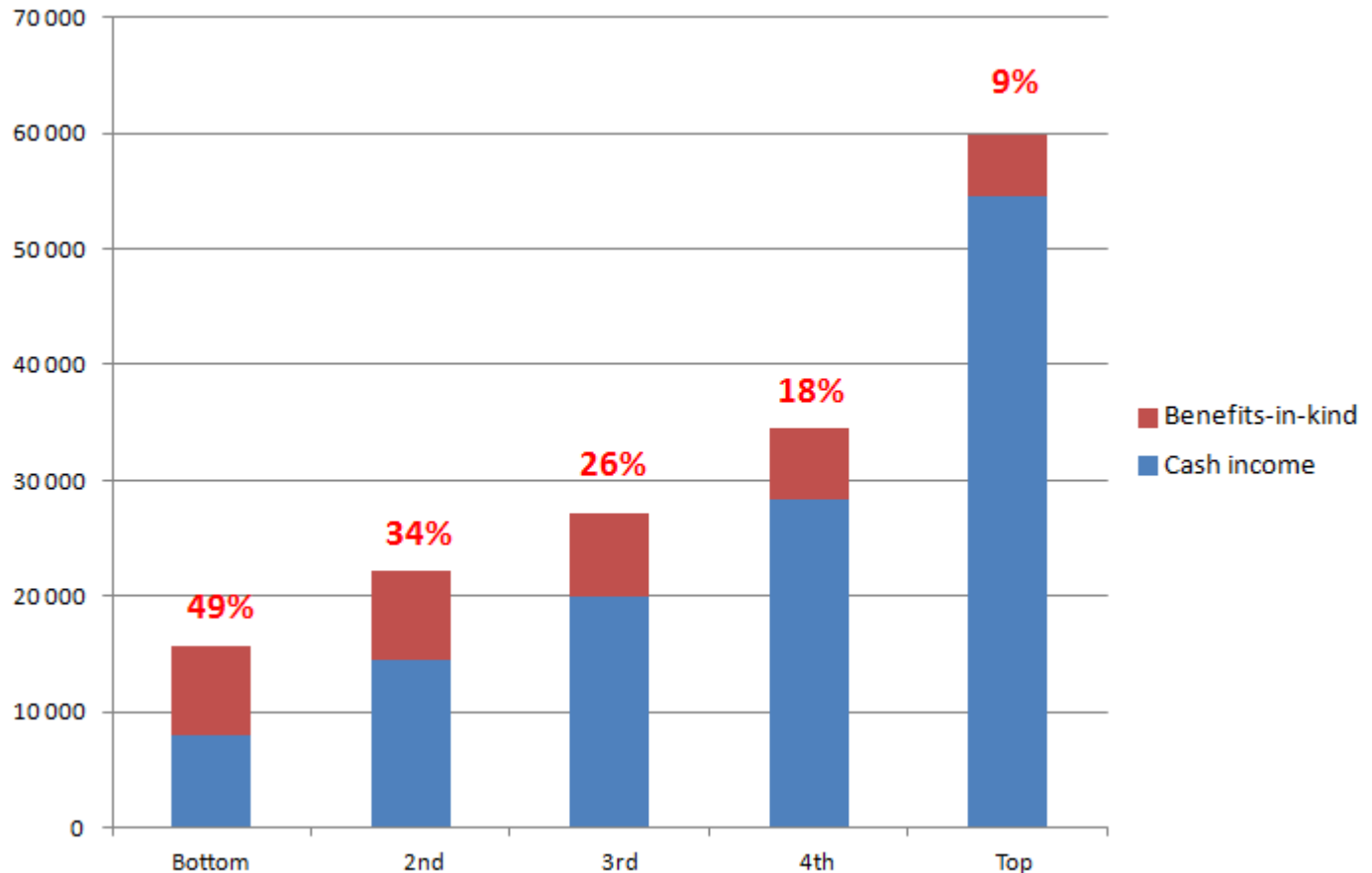
*“Public services at their best ... help the strong look after the weak and they add strength to local communities. **But public services at their worst can exaggerate inequality and devastate families by failing those who need us the most.**”*

Jack McConnell MSP, First Minister, 9 January  
2002

## Value of public services for low income households



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## The Cost of the Cuts: The impact on local government and poorer communities (with Nick Bailey, Glen Bramley and Maria Gannon)

- Analysis of budget cuts at the national level (England and Scotland) – impacts on different kinds of councils
- Four mixed methods case studies of the impact of austerity on local councils (*councils which aimed to protect poorer groups*) .
  - Quantitative analysis:
    - Analysis of budgetary information to identify financial value of ‘savings’ made to council services 2011-2016
    - Analysis of service ‘savings’ in relation to bespoke classification of services on a pro-poor – neutral – pro-rich spectrum (see Hastings et al, 2015 for detail)
    - Calibration of service ‘savings’ according to levels of spend on the service
    - Facilitates analysis of which services are being protected (or not) as budget cuts are made, and of whether these are the services used more by poorer groups

- Qualitative analysis

Aims to capture nature, meaning and import of service ‘savings’ – particularly for poor people and places – from:

- Service users - parents living in more or less disadvantaged neighbourhoods **Nine focus groups involving fifty-nine participants, nine of these took part in in depth follow up interviews**
- Staff from voluntary organisations providing local services **27 interviews**
- Strategic officers within the case studies more than **40 interviews, plus feedback sessions in case studies involving circa 15 staff**
- Front-line council staff **4 focus groups involving 33 participants, 8 further participants ‘shadowed’**

## Three ways in which cuts to local authority budgets are driving further inequality

1. The disproportionate impact of budget cuts on local authorities with higher levels of deprivation.
2. The proportion of local government service expenditure which is 'pro-poor'
3. Cuts in 'universal' services impact disproportionately on poorer people

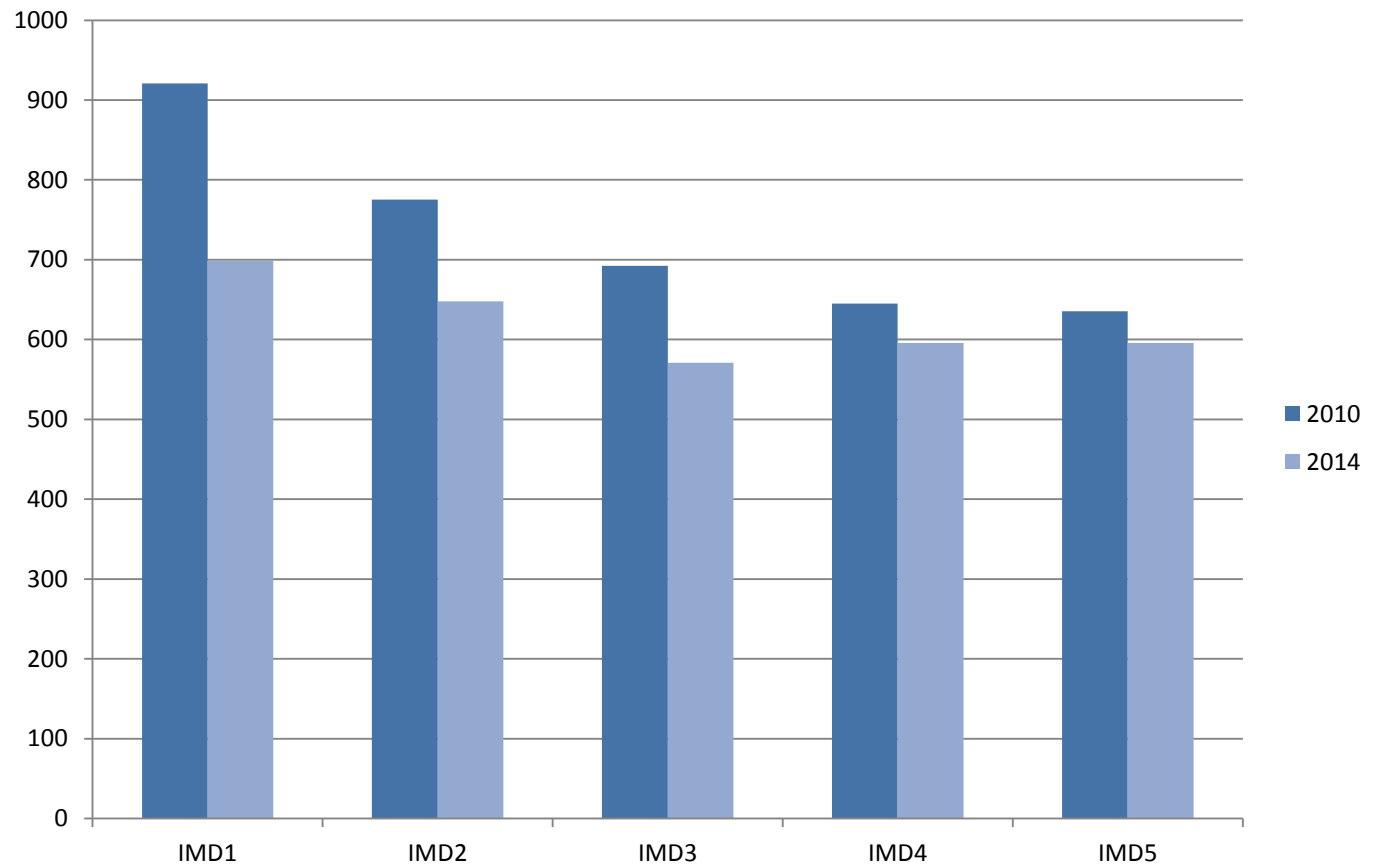
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# **Mechanism 1: the disproportionate impact of cuts on local authorities with high levels of disadvantage**



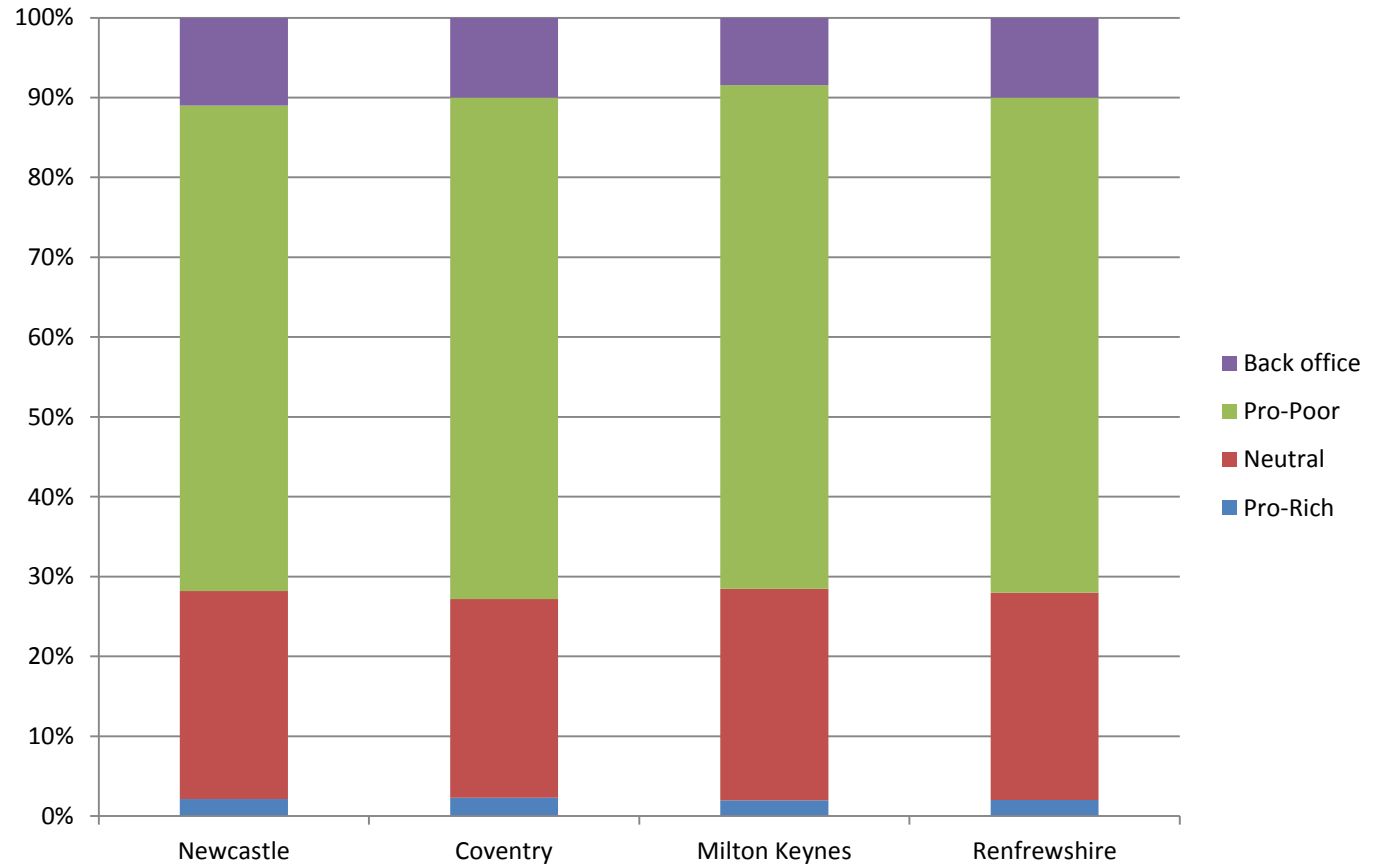


The spending differential between disadvantaged and better off councils is in sharp decline



# **Mechanism 2: the work of local government is pro-poor**

## Councils spend almost two thirds of their resources on the services which poorer groups rely on



# **Mechanism 3: Cuts in neutral 'universal' services impact disproportionately on poorer groups**

- Increased costs and charges

*(Public transport is) really expensive ... I only go out once a day now. I've stopped taking the baby out* (Service user, disadvantaged neighbourhood)

- Reduced opening hours

*There's times I can't go (to the library) because I've got my wee boy all the time so I have to wait until somebody can watch him if I need to go and do something on the computer and there's been times I went in and it's been shut and its' five o'clock'* (Service user, disadvantaged neighbourhood)

- (Re) centralisation of services

*I wouldn't come (to the children's centre)... its too stressful to get here for a certain time. Getting the bus with three kids – no thanks!* (Service user, disadvantaged neighbourhood)

- The impacts of cuts accumulate quicker in poorer areas.  
*'We actually gave up in one area because we couldn't use the space. You know it wasn't clean it wasn't fit for the children to use and we had to withdraw like 'cos you know if there's nobody going out there cutting the grass, dealing with the dog poo, the broken glass or possibly worse syringes or whatever.'* (Voluntary sector, case study 3)
- 'Better off' service users can protect themselves  
*There seems to be about 10 families in the cluster driving around getting their name down first* (Children's services provider)

## Final reflections

- There are more and more fundamental cuts to come – especially in pro-poor services.
  - LAs are severely constrained in protecting the poor
- A real and present danger of residualisation of the sector
  - Under funded and highly targeted
  - Poor quality, unmet need and loss of ‘buy in’ from the better off
  - Loss of collective solidarity
- Local authority services *exaggerate* rather than *mitigate* inequality

## Selected project publications

- [Bailey, N.](#), [Bramley, G.](#), and [Hastings, A.](#) (2015) Local Responses to 'austerity'. *Local Government Studies*, 41(4), pp. 571-581. (doi:[10.1080/03003930.2015.1036988](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2015.1036988))
- [Hastings, A.](#), [Bailey, N.](#), [Gannon, M.](#), [Besemer, K.](#), and [Bramley, G.](#) (2015) Coping with the cuts? The management of the worst financial settlement in living memory. *Local Government Studies*, 41(4), pp. 601-621. (doi:[10.1080/03003930.2015.1036987](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2015.1036987))
- [Hastings, A.](#), [N. Bailey](#), [Bramley, G.](#), [Gannon, M.](#) and [Watkins.](#) (2015). The cost of the cuts: the impact on local government and poorer communities. Summary Report Joseph Rowntree Foundation : York. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/Summary-Final.pdf>
- [Hastings, A.](#), [N. Bailey](#), [Bramley, G.](#), [Gannon, M.](#) and [Watkins.](#) (2015). The cost of the cuts: the impact on local government and poorer communities. Project Report Joseph Rowntree Foundation : York. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/CostofCuts-Full.pdf>
- [Hastings, A.](#), [Bailey, N.](#), [Besemer, K.](#), [Bramley, G.](#), [Gannon, M.](#), and [Watkins, D.](#) (2013) [Coping with The Cuts: Local Authorities and Poorer Communities.](#) Project Report. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/coping-with-cuts>
- [Hastings, A.](#), [Bramley, G.](#), [Bailey, N.](#), and [Watkins, D.](#) (2012) [Serving deprived communities in a recession.](#) Project Report. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, UK. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/communities-recession-services-full.pdf>