



LEARNING AND LEADING TOGETHER

MEAM strategy
2026–2030



Making Every
Adult Matter

INTRODUCTION

The last five years have seen significant change for people facing multiple disadvantage.

The systemic drivers have become more prevalent. So too have the symptoms such as homelessness, substance use, mental ill health, domestic violence and contact with the criminal justice system.

Right now, people and services are struggling, but through the work of MEAM and the local areas we support, there are also many signs of hope.

Across the country, a new model of public leadership has been slowly emerging. Whether in statutory or voluntary services, government, policy or commissioning, it is no longer enough to just focus on one issue. Instead people are increasingly working with partners across silos, shaping places and transforming local systems.

We see this happening every day: local areas building cross-sector partnerships; systems change focused on providing people the personalised, trauma-informed and strengths-based support they need; the government confirming further funding for Changing Futures; and new requirements on all local authorities to consider multiple disadvantage via the Local Outcomes Framework.

While political will and funding has varied over time, MEAM has stood firm as the trusted provider of knowledge, support, encouragement and networking for the people and places doing the difficult work of systems change.

With our partners and funders, old and new, we will continue to drive momentum on multiple disadvantage in the years ahead. This document sets out our plans for 2026–2030.

We look forward to working with you.

ABOUT MEAM AND MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE

MEAM

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is the national charity supporting practitioners, policymakers and people with lived experience to transform services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage. Formed as a coalition in 2009 we work across sectors, across government, and with more than 50 local areas to improve responses and change lives.

Our support includes bespoke partnership development, training, consultancy and learning partner activity. We work with areas across the country and also facilitate the vibrant MEAM Approach network. Since January 2025, we have operated as a charity with our partners Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind on our board.

MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE

People facing multiple disadvantage experience a combination of problems. For many, their current circumstances are shaped by long-term experiences of poverty, deprivation, trauma, abuse and neglect. Many also face racism, sexism and homophobia.

These structural inequalities intersect in different ways, manifesting in a combination of experiences including (but not limited to) homelessness, substance use, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health.

Multiple disadvantage is a systemic and not an individual issue. Over many years, public services have been designed, commissioned and delivered in silos. This starts at the top and permeates down through funding and commissioning. While this works for many, it often fails people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Often, services end up being offered on a “We do this” basis – services offering one thing, on their terms, and at a location and time of their choosing, regardless of what the person might actually need. This is not the fault of services, it is a problem created by the systems we live and work in.

Our work with local areas seeks to turn this on its head, creating local systems, informed by lived experience, that can ask: “What do you need to move forward?” and “How can we, as a whole system, support you with that?” This is a fundamental re-imagining of what it means to provide support.

“Multiple disadvantage is a systemic and not an individual issue.”

VISION, MISSION AND APPROACH

Our vision is that everyone experiencing multiple disadvantage can live rich and fulfilling lives as defined by them.

Our mission is to support local areas across the United Kingdom to develop empowering and inclusive services and systems that offer people the dignified, self-directed and aspirational support they deserve. We use our knowledge and experience from this work to influence policy at a national, regional and local level.

Our work is informed by our unique approach:

- **Systemic:** Multiple disadvantage is a systemic and not an individual issue. It is caused and perpetuated by how systems work and by policy choices, yet often blamed on people. MEAM will always start from the position of multiple disadvantage being a systemic problem.
- **Collaborative:** Tackling multiple disadvantage requires a collective and collaborative approach. MEAM models the collaboration we want to see from local services and national government. We work closely with a wide range of local and national partners, while also valuing our independence and unique position. We are open, honest and reflective in everything we do.

- **Supportive and practical, yet ambitious:** We work with local areas and national policymakers who want to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We are ambitious about the change we want to see at individual, service, system and policy levels. At the same time, we recognise the constraints that people are working within and that things do not change overnight. We take a supportive and practical approach, starting where people are at while also encouraging them to be ambitious. Our work is both iterative and transformative.

- **Inclusive and guided by experience:** Our ultimate aim is to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We recognise that meaningful change must be based on a new balance of power between people with experience of multiple disadvantage, the people who support them, and the people who make decisions that affect them. We are committed to meaningfully coproducing our activities and being guided by the views of everyone we work with. We work closely alongside the MEAM Expert Group to shape, support and challenge our work. We use our unique position to bridge the gap between national and local policymakers and the experiences of services and individuals, ensuring that everyone benefits from each other's expertise.

“Tackling multiple disadvantage requires a collective and collaborative approach.”

“I’ve left the [MEAM Systems Leadership] programme with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of how to lead within a complex system. I’m also incredibly grateful for the connections I’ve made and the shared learning journey we’ve embarked on.”

STRATEGIC AIMS

People facing multiple disadvantage need immediate help, and MEAM is actively supporting local services on a daily basis.

Our activities in 2026–2030 will be focused around four strategic aims,

reflecting our work with people, services, systems and policy. There is of course some cut-across on these domains and our work is purposefully focused on avoiding internal silos.

AIM 1 PEOPLE

By 2030, people experiencing multiple disadvantage and those who work alongside them will be better connected, leading to personalised support which meets people where they are.

AIM 2 SERVICES

By 2030, services will work with people and partner agencies in a strengths-based, trauma-informed and effective way.

AIM 3 SYSTEMS

By 2030, all local systems will understand multiple disadvantage and its systemic drivers and have partnerships in place to collaboratively lead change.

AIM 4 POLICY

By 2030, the national policy environment will incentivise and support local areas to transform services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage.

AIM 1 PEOPLE

By 2030, people experiencing multiple disadvantage and those who work alongside them will be better connected, leading to personalised support which meets people where they are.

People are at the heart of everything we do. Systems and services are formed of people. Whether people use services, work in services, or make decisions that impact people or services, MEAM brings individuals together to share skills and knowledge and to improve outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage.

Through our work, we will:

- Improve the wellbeing of people using and working in services, including increased feelings of safety, joy, self-esteem, belonging and being understood.
- Increase opportunities for people to influence and shape service design and delivery.
- Enable people to experience greater autonomy and inclusivity in service access.
- Ensure that people receive support which recognises issues as systemic.

KEY PRIORITIES

Coproduction

We will coproduce our work with people facing multiple disadvantage and support local areas to do the same. We will offer coproduction support to local areas, run regular Coproduction Clinics for the network, and work alongside the members of the MEAM Expert Group to shape and deliver our work.

Peer support

We will bring people together on a regular basis via our frontline practitioner and strategic leads meetings to learn and share. We will network people with others across the country for peer support and provide advice and support for people doing the difficult work of systems change.

Intersectional and anti-oppression

We know that everyone's experience of multiple disadvantage is unique and that oppression, racism and discrimination contribute to people's exclusion. We will continue to take an intersectional approach to our work, holding space for our team and the local areas we support to develop their knowledge. We will challenge ourselves and others to take an anti-racist and anti-oppression approach to the work we and they do.

Training

We will provide a wide range of accessible, friendly and welcoming training. Our training courses help people in varied roles across local systems to understand multiple disadvantage as a systemic issue and to improve their knowledge and skills.



MEAM IN ACTION

MEAM was asked by a local area to help them design a new homelessness service by engaging providers, commissioners, people with lived experience and other local residents in the process. MEAM trained and supported a local group of people with lived experience and ran a series of facilitated community sessions. We also provided wider training and support to staff, resulting in the effective opening of the new service.

AIM 2 SERVICES

By 2030, services will work with people and partner agencies in a strengths-based, trauma-informed and effective way.

When working well together, local voluntary and statutory services can provide vital support to people facing multiple disadvantage.

Unfortunately, many services are still driven by policy, commissioning and funding structures to operate transactionally, instead of providing the personalised and relational support that people need.

Our work seeks to change this, helping services to ask “What do you need to move forward?” and to consider how they can partner with others across local systems to create flexible responses and achieve shared goals.

We recognise that support does not come solely from services – the role of community is a vital part of people’s recovery. Services should be rooted in and reflective of the local communities they serve.

Through our work we will help local areas create services that:

- Recognise people’s individual needs and are relational, trauma-informed and strengths-based.
- Understand risk appropriately and support people effectively.
- Partner closely with others across local systems.
- Are equitable, inclusive, invested in social justice, accessible and flexible.
- Are built on trust, responsible and sustainable.
- Link closely with communities and community groups.
- Are designed and delivered alongside the people who use them.

KEY PRIORITIES

Bespoke support

We will provide bespoke support to statutory and voluntary services, helping them to consider their role within local systems and enabling them to connect effectively with local partnership structures that are seeking to drive change (see also Aim 3).

Networking and learning

We will provide an annual programme of Learning Hubs and a national Summit, helping local services to access the latest learning and best practice, and to form links with others across the country doing similar work.

Widening the conversation

We will widen our reach to voluntary, statutory and community services across a range of different sectors, helping them to explore what multiple disadvantage means for their work, creating new offers from MEAM that can support their priorities, and linking them into local partnership structures.

Resources

We will support local services with good practice, online resources and learning summaries to support their work.



MEAM IN ACTION

Our Partnerships Development Manager and Consultancy Team work closely with statutory and voluntary services in MEAM Approach areas and beyond, helping them to improve their practice and to engage effectively with others across their local systems.

AIM 3 SYSTEMS

By 2030, all local systems will understand multiple disadvantage and its systemic drivers and have partnerships in place to collaboratively lead change.

Local systems are formed of people, services, cultures, policies, processes and resources. They sit within larger national systems that impact their operation. Traditionally, systems are siloed and deficit-based – with finance, commissioning and outcome structures incentivising services to focus on singular issues.

Today's public service leaders (at all levels within organisations) need to be able to operate across systems and not just across services or departments.

Our work helps local systems to recognise the systemic drivers of multiple disadvantage and to create shared vision and values; the capacity for continuous learning; joint approaches to risk; effective commissioning; and the flexible, trauma-informed and strengths-based responses that people need, when they need it.

Through our work, we will ensure that systems:

- Understand multiple disadvantage as a systemic issue and create shared vision and values.
- Can actively learn, creating measures that capture the depth of local approaches and use evidence to adapt and be agile.
- Can commission effectively, talking a cross-system approach.
- Share risk appropriately.
- Provide flexible responses for people facing multiple disadvantage.
- Put in place the policies and structures ('plumbing') for sustainable collaboration.
- Take a preventative approach.
- Understand and embed the importance of service relationships and interdependence.

KEY PRIORITIES

Systems leadership

We will provide systems leadership training and support to anyone working within a local system, recognising that the ability to impact the system exists at all levels within organisations. Our landmark Systems Leadership Programme (provided over six sessions) helps create the leaders of the future. We also offer shorter taster courses to develop key skills.

Bespoke support to local areas

We provide bespoke support to local systems that want to transform the way they support people facing multiple disadvantage. This may be via an area joining the MEAM Approach network, through commercial support from our expert Consultancy Team, or as part of our support to national programmes such as Changing Futures.

Creating local infrastructure

We help local areas to think about the infrastructure ('plumbing') they need to ensure that better systems are sustainable. This may include work on policies, processes, structures, values and cultures.

Bringing systems together

We support people in all roles across local and national systems – commissioners, providers, policymakers, people with lived experience – to access peer support, to learn from each other, and to be inspired and informed by the work that others are doing across the country.



MEAM IN ACTION

We were commissioned by a local area to help them develop and embed a process for 'active learning' to support systems change. The work started with a refresh of the partnership's vision and values, before co-creating area-wide learning structures to ensure that learning from practice could shape policies and funding. Alongside this we ran a cohort of our Systems Leadership Programme to further develop capability across the system.

AIM 4 POLICY

By 2030, the national policy environment will incentivise and support local areas to transform services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage.

The silo-based approach to multiple disadvantage starts at the top and permeates down through funding and commissioning, creating local services that focus on singular issues. While local areas can take action alone (and many have done so), they have to fight against the tide of national funding, commissioning and outcome structures that shape the local environment.

Through programmes like Changing Futures this situation is starting to change, but for effective action on multiple disadvantage to exist across the country the national environment will need to support and incentivise a new way of working in all local areas.

Through our work we will ensure that government can:

- Make a clear and cross-departmental commitment to multiple disadvantage, which recognises it as a systemic problem and acknowledges and articulates how government policy and processes contribute to silo-based systems.
- Actively challenge the cross-departmental barriers to a better way of working, driving internal policy and cultural change as a result.
- Listen and learn from lived experience and local areas across all policy areas.
- Provide long-term and sustainable funding for local areas doing the important work of systems change.

KEY PRIORITIES

Learning and evidence

We will continue to collate and develop learning and evidence from our local work to inform policymakers at local and national levels. We will increase the role of lived experience in our policy work, and enable an anti-racist and anti-oppression lens.

Support to national programmes

We will continue our support to vital national programmes on multiple disadvantage such as Changing Futures, recognising our unique ability to bridge the gap between local services and systems, people facing multiple disadvantage, and officials and ministers working across government. We will ensure that multiple disadvantage remains a core focus of wider public service reform programmes.

Tackling stigma

We will work to ensure that policy does not stigmatise people facing multiple disadvantage and challenge constructively when this is the case. We will use our own communications to promote the work happening in local areas, using this to tackle stigma among the general public at the local and national level.

Stable and consistent leadership

We will ensure that MEAM continues to stand firm as the trusted provider of knowledge, support, encouragement and networking for the people and places doing the difficult work of systems change, regardless of the funding or political environment.



MEAM IN ACTION

In 2015, MEAM and the Caluoste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) published a paper titled “Individuals with multiple needs: The case for a national focus.” Using economic evidence from the early work of the MEAM Approach network, this paper helped to create the conditions for the emergence of the Changing Futures programme, which has run from 2021 and is now confirmed until at least 2029. MEAM has continued to help shape this programme and regularly engages with government departments on a range of topics related to multiple disadvantage.



“This is a strong network, packed with really committed people – that’s the real strength.”

“...often the most striking thing to me is how much people seem to benefit from being able to air challenges and gain reassurance and reinforcement from others who are trying to tackle the same systemic problems.”

WORKING TOGETHER

Significant progress has been made on tackling multiple disadvantage, but there is still much more work to do.

Whatever your role in local or national systems, we hope that the plans we have set out in this strategy encourage you in your work to tackle multiple disadvantage. Everyone has a unique role to play.

We are always looking to work with new people, organisations and local areas. Please do get in touch if you would like to discuss:

- Bespoke partnership development support for local areas.
- Our accessible, friendly, and welcoming training courses, designed to help

multi-agency workforces understand multiple disadvantage as a systemic issue and improve their day-to-day delivery skills.

- Our Systems Leadership Programme, developed to support future-ready public service leaders capable of operating effectively across complex system boundaries.
- Our expert consultancy and learning partner support, offering bespoke input on coproduction, evaluation, cross-sector system challenges, local partnership approaches (policies, processes, values and cultures) and learning infrastructure.

Contact us at: info@meam.org.uk

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

MEAM’s work requires the ongoing support of a range of funders. We are grateful for their support and always keen to build partnerships with others who share a commitment to supporting people facing multiple disadvantage.

We would also like to thank the individuals, organisations and areas which commission our support or purchase our training and consultancy – we are grateful for the ongoing partnership and opportunity to work together.

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