



A Place Toolkit for Improving Health through Economic Development



Metro — Dynamics

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This toolkit is intended to support places in England – leaders and practitioners in local government, strategic authorities, local public services and the voluntary and community sector – to deliver health outcomes through local economic development projects and programmes. The toolkit has been developed as part of a project carried out by the Growth and Reform Network with the Health Foundation that includes a comprehensive review of available evidence on health outcomes from place-based economic development from the UK and comparable countries, including the Health Foundation’s Economies for Healthier Lives (EHL) programme. The [evidence review](#) is accompanied by a [policy report](#) that makes national policy recommendations to enable places to further embed and demonstrate health outcomes.



The toolkit is structured to:

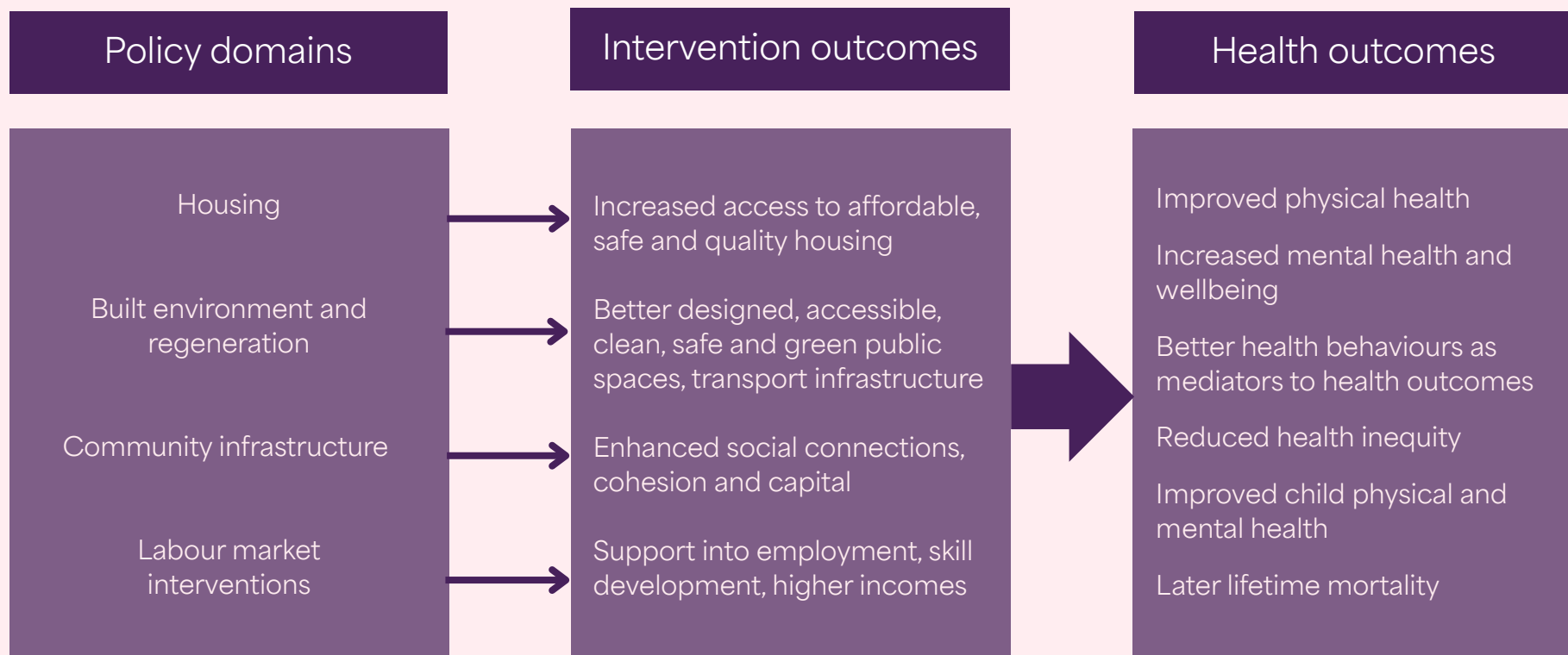
- detail findings from the evidence review on observed health outcomes from economic development interventions and critical features of success
- link to programme case studies and evidence
- set out steps for places in England to take with local and strategic authority levers in improving health through economic development.

This toolkit was researched and written by the Growth and Reform Network and Metro Dynamics, and supported by The Health Foundation. The Health Foundation is an independent charitable organisation working to build a healthier UK.

Leveraging local and regional levers to deliver health outcomes

The [evidence review](#) covered a broad range of studies and looked in detail at place-based economic and social interventions that have demonstrated health outcomes from the UK and international comparator economies. The evidence identified where interventions demonstrated direct intended outcomes – for example, increased access to affordable, safe and quality housing – and also resulted in observed health outcomes – for example, improved physical and mental health. Figure 1 illustrates that health outcomes are demonstrated as secondary to the direct intervention outcomes, and show the types of health outcomes observed. The later evidence section further details example interventions and outcomes studied in the evidence review.

Figure 1. Direct intervention outcomes and categories of health outcome observed from policy domains in the evidence review



The [evidence review](#) found that in order to deliver on health outcomes, there is a common set of critical success features in the design of interventions:

1. **Multicomponent design** – combining complementary services in intervention design
2. **Sustained intensity and duration** – with minimum engagement period for interventions (evidence suggests 6–36 months)
3. **Context-sensitive delivery** – flexing to local and community context for delivery
4. **Workforce capacity and implementation quality** – experienced practitioners alongside empowered management
5. **Delivery infrastructure and financial sustainability** – integrated into existing systems and programmes with multi-year funding
6. **Embedded learning and political coherence** – systems for real-time monitoring and evaluation and adaptation, with sustained political commitment and coordination.

The [evidence review](#) looked at interventions in two categories: economic development and socioeconomic policy. This reflects the fact that to make a measured difference on health outcomes, multiple service and economic levers and functions are usually needed to address complex problems and support people to thrive. It also reflects the fact that much of the international evidence on place-based initiatives covers a broader spectrum of public tools at the disposal of place leaders – for example, healthcare, welfare and tax incentives. In the UK context, in what remains one of the most centralised economies, with a highly centralised NHS, the practical reality is that local government and regional strategic authorities with Mayors in England have far more limited tools, powers and funding control than in comparable countries.

We therefore focus here on the levers that are available to places – with a focus on the strategic and local tiers in England. Table 1 sets out from the evidence review the definitions of the two categories of intervention: economic development and socioeconomic policy. It lists the policy domains studied in the evidence review, and sets out the current local authority and strategic authority levers that places in England have across the two categories. These levers are mostly concentrated in economic development functions, with some limited socioeconomic functions, focused on early-years interventions.

	Economic development	Socioeconomic policy
Definition	Public action to improve regional economic capacity through investment, innovation, infrastructure and skills to improve productivity, employment and long-term wellbeing.	Government programmes designed to influence economic development, but not usually defined as economic development interventions, to improve quality of life and population health.
Policy domains studied in the evidence review	• Housing – housing quality, social and supported housing, energy efficiency and housing mobility • Built environment and regeneration – urban renewal, neighbourhood design, transport, infrastructure, active travel, green space • Community infrastructure – community development, social capital, art and culture, volunteering • Labour markets – active labour market intervention and employment support, wage policy, vocational training, health and safety, disability support.	Welfare – social security benefits, unemployment insurance, conditional cash transfers, welfare to work, welfare advice • Early-years and family support – childhood education, childcare, child healthcare and welfare, parent support, parental leave, family welfare and advice • Fiscal policy – preventative health taxation, e.g. food and drink, alcohol; school-age food subsidies.
Strategic Authority levers	Foundation Strategic Authorities (non-mayoral) • Strategic economic development functions and local growth funding • Voluntary local growth plans • Business support and innovation • Business and investor engagement • Adult Education Budget devolution, local skills planning • Spatial development plans and Homes England compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers • Host for certain government functions (eg Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs)) Mayoral Strategic Authorities (as above, plus...) • Investment Fund • Statutory local growth plans • Enhanced role in employment and adult skills programmes • Strategic transport authority responsibilities (eg bus franchising, local transport plans) • Mayoral Development Corporations • Locally led brownfield funding	Foundation Strategic Authorities (non-mayoral) • Pooling of services and local innovation • A new duty on improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities, aligned to local authorities' duty • Convening role in public service reform and cross-cutting issues • Role in delivering through Local Resilience Forums Mayoral Strategic Authorities (as above, plus...) • Role for mayors on NHS integrated care partnerships (ICPs) and boards (ICBs) – encouraging mayoral chairing of ICBs and closer strategic alignment with strategic authorities • Control of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and fire and rescue functions where boundaries align Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities (as above, plus...) • Government department-style multi-year Integrated Settlement competences across skills and employment support; health, wellbeing and public service reform

Strategic Authority levers	Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities (as above, plus...) • Government departmental-style multi-year Integrated Settlement across spatial planning and housing, economic development, transport, skills, net zero, public safety • Recyclable mayoral growth funding • Full flexibility over Skills Bootcamps and Free Courses for Jobs funding • Strategic control in Affordable Homes Programme • Labour Market Partnership Boards	
Local authority levers	• Planning for residential and commercial land use • Capital project development • Transport and built environment development • Asset ownership – land and property • Economic development and employment support funding, eg UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).	• Early-years provision and primary education • Children’s services • Public health and duty on health improvement • Engagement with residents including through housing services, adult and children’s services, local democracy and consultation • Connection to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) through local services.

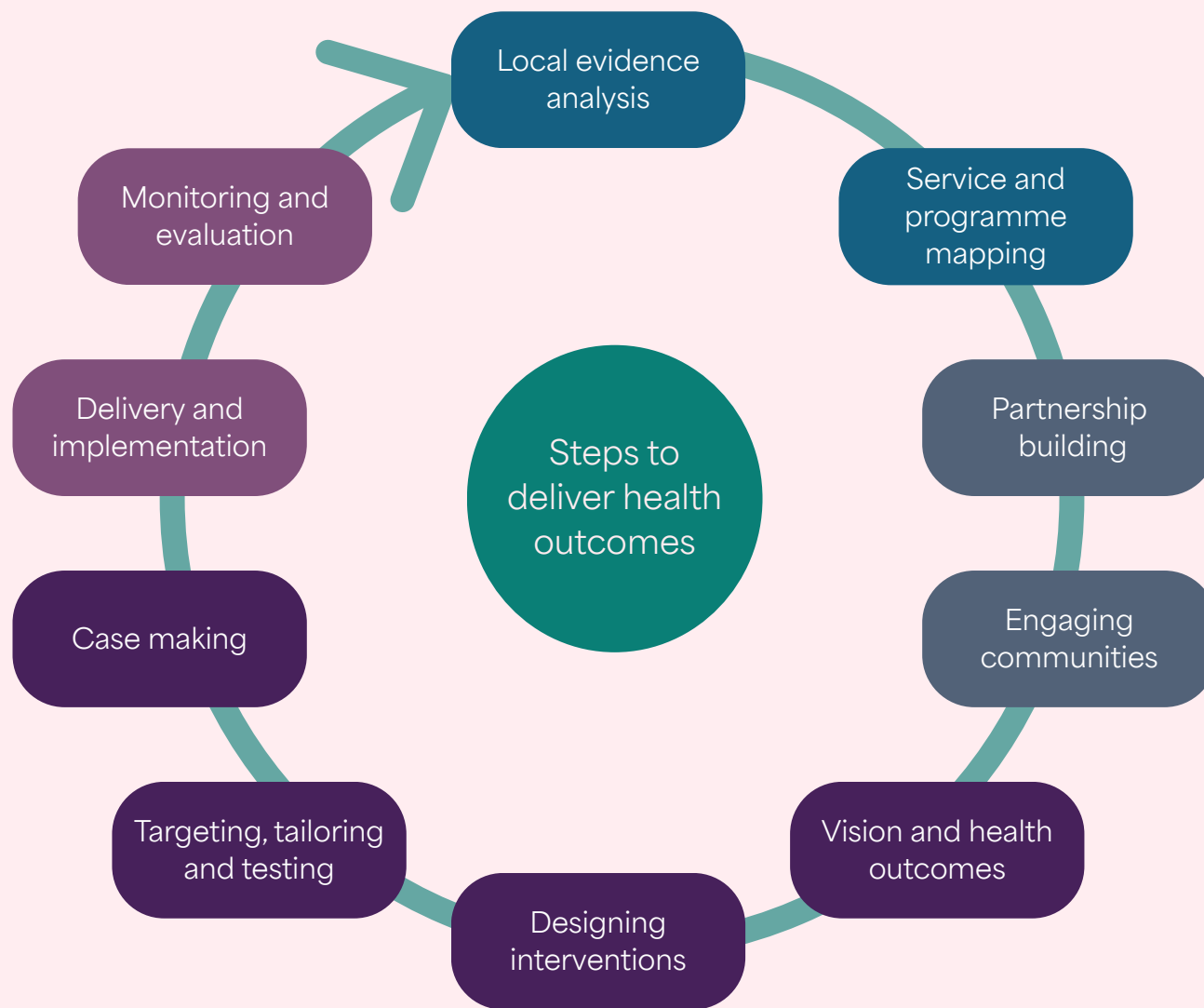
Table 1. England strategic authority and local authority levers and policy domains from the evidence review.

Steps to delivering health outcomes

The critical success features identified in the [evidence review](#) show that there is a compounding effect of multiple interventions being made together in a joined-up way, when interventions are tailored to the communities they intend to serve, and designed into the context and local system and environment with other services and economic development activity. There is a clear role for local and regional government to join up the dots in places in strategy, design, engagement and delivery – between the local, regional and national levels; between specialised targeted programmes and mainstream local responsibilities; and between target cohorts of people and all local communities when delivering on economic development.

Figure 2 and Table 2 below present a set of steps that are key to embedding health outcomes into economic development in places – these come together in core economic development activity together to meet the critical success features of intervention design. These are the building blocks for developing a local theory of change with partners that is developed on the basis of deep understanding of the local context – population characteristics, health and economic needs, economic opportunities, service provision and barriers to improved outcomes.

Figure 2. Process of place-based steps to deliver health outcomes through economic development



Steps to deliver health outcomes		Tools
Local evidence analysis	Collating, analysing and visualising local data – bringing together economic and social data on demographics, outcomes and trends, alongside local service data in health, care and education, by region, local authority and neighbourhood – in a format to share with partners	• What Works for Local Economic Growth – Evidence resources • The Health Foundation – Evidence Hub: What drives health inequalities?
Service and programme mapping	Mapping existing local delivery and impact of services and programmes, assessing gaps in provision linked to evidence	• Youth Futures Foundation – Example system and programme mapping
Partnership building	Building working relationships with anchor institutions, and the public, private and VCFSE sectors, developing trust, sharing intelligence	• Leeds City Council – Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network lessons
Engaging communities	Engaging service users and people with lived experience in the process in communities identified through evidence	• Local Trust – Community action Plans and Toolkits • Power to Change – Empowering Places – Change Framework
Vision and health outcomes	Developing a shared vision for change with partners and priority health outcomes based on local context and needs	• HM Government – Shared Outcomes Toolkit for Integrated Care Systems
Designing interventions	Designing interventions, building on what works, adapting and improving ongoing programmes and creating new ideas, across local levers and funding opportunities	• Foundations – Example intervention design framework – Family Hubs
Targeting, tailoring and testing	Agreeing how to target beneficiaries and tailor interventions to their circumstances, and testing pilot approaches based on evaluations and evidence	• DHSC – Public Health Outcomes Framework • Metro Dynamics – Levelling Up the Lifecycle tool

Case making	Developing the case for funding, adopting and scaling new approaches, and changes to services and teams, understanding social, economic and financial impact	• HM Government – The Green Book and Accompanying Guidance, business case tools and templates • HM Government – Green Book Review 2025
Delivery and implementation	Developing delivery routes, implementation and resourcing	
Monitoring and evaluation	Implementing monitoring and evaluation processes with clear outcomes and expectations at the start of programmes, and structures to iteratively adapt delivery and foster learning	• What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth – Evaluation resources • HM Government – the Magenta Book guidance on designing evaluation

Evidence and case studies

Tables 3-7 below summarise where the [evidence review](#) found health outcomes demonstrated from different types of intervention, sets out the approach to intervention design, outcomes observed, and conditions for success, and links to programme case studies. From the large studies, there is evidence available on some specific outcomes from some interventions – the interventions and case studies below are those most applicable to place-based economic development functions in England and the UK, using the levers that local authorities and strategic authorities have the power to deliver. They focus on the four economic development policy domains from the evidence review – housing; built environment and regeneration; community infrastructure; and labour market interventions – as well as the most relevant place-based socioeconomic policy domain: early-years and family support.



Tables 3-7. Evidence studied, example case studies, outcomes observed, and conditions for success across policy domains.

Housing				
Evidence	Case studies	Approach	Outcomes observed	Conditions for success
Quality and upgraded housing	Retrofit programme in deprived neighbourhoods , New Zealand	Energy efficiency retrofit programme targeted at tackling fuel poverty and poor housing conditions	Positive health outcomes observed from improved physical environments and healthier housing	Equity concerns need to be addressed when targeting programmes through engagement with communities to understand varied individual circumstances and potential unintended consequences
Housing provision with connected support	Housing First model , US, England, Canada, Denmark	Local public service connections initiated by finding and supporting housing first	Decreased stress and exposure to hazards, increased feeling of safety and mental wellbeing - especially for lower-income households	Planners need to work with communities on cohesion and social connections when considering interventions that may increase movement out of communities
Housing mobility	GoWell , Glasgow Moving to Opportunity , US	Finding better housing for households, in less deprived neighbourhoods with improved environments	Mobility schemes support low-income households to move to lower-poverty areas with healthier environments	



Built environment and regeneration				
Evidence	Case studies	Approach	Outcomes observed	Conditions for success
Housing-led regeneration with community infrastructure	Dutch Districts Approach , Netherlands Communities First , Wales	Focused employment, education and physical environment interventions in deprived neighbourhoods	Multiple components covered across interventions leading to overall positive health outcomes from increased physical activity and access to nature, and decreased stress	Health outcomes need to be agreed as programme goals from the outset to ensure that health considerations are taken into account through the design, engagement and delivery process
Active travel and neighbourhood design	Turin neighbourhood design , Italy	Neighbourhoods designed with increased density, access to transport and services and natural environment		Access equity is crucial to achieving outcomes across populations - particularly to benefit lower-income communities
Blue and green space development	Belfast Connswater Community Greenway , Northern Ireland	Increasing awareness and perceptions of green and blue space, accessibility to neighbourhoods and resulting increased frequent and prolonged usage, impacting health outcomes		Plans for governance, local responsibility and maintenance need to be agreed and communicated with local communities



Community infrastructure

Evidence	Case studies	Approach	Outcomes observed	Conditions for success
Social capital development	<u>New Deal for Communities</u> , England	Integrated programme of access to services, volunteering, and community organising on neighbourhood and service design	Increased social connection, civic participation Resident decision-making and influence in neighbourhood planning leading to increased health service access, healthier behaviours and physical environment, and improved mental and physical health outcomes	Interventions require the adequate implementation 'dose' in order to reach intended beneficiaries in a sustained way Integration of environment and neighbourhood planning, services, and individual circumstances and accessibility is essential in a cohesive design tailored to the local community to achieve equity outcomes
Physical environment - neighbourhood planning and public realm development with support services	<u>Well London</u>	Upskilling residents and communities to participate in neighbourhood organising and service access		



Labour market interventions				
Evidence	Case studies	Approach	Outcomes observed	Conditions for success
Active labour market programmes	Flexi-jobs programme , Denmark Access to Work , UK	Support during unemployment including job search support and matching, employability training, health and wellbeing support, employer incentives, for people with a health condition or disability	Programmes connect individuals to physical and mental health services, improving outcomes, and tailor support to challenges related to job searching and employment	Need structured programmes that are tailored to meet individuals' skill, health and other needs, addressing the individual barriers they face in the labour market and in employment; this involves connecting to relevant local services, and simplifying advice and support for individuals, eg around welfare, helping people to navigate complex systems
Job quality design with employers to reward and retain people in employment	Four day work week trials , UK	Testing shorter, more flexible work weeks	Opportunities for training and volunteering in preparation for job searches and employment enhance social and health outcomes, alongside skill uptake, particularly seen in mental health outcomes in economic downturns from focused programmes	Structuring work and occupational health support to the needs of lower-income employees is especially effective
Workplace and occupational health	Health Circles , Germany	Occupational health provision, advice and support to support people in work to retain employment, following or preventing sick leave	Based on service user feedback, support programmes provide a positive experience for participants	Programmes that emphasise building positive skills and experiences over punitive conditionality enhance mental health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce unintended stress and harm These require strong institutional leadership and commitment to provide individual support within service structures.



Early-years and family support

Evidence	Case studies	Approach	Outcomes observed	Conditions for success
Integrated family support and early education	Sure Start , England Head Start , US	One-stop shop for child education, childcare, healthcare and parenting support with employment support	Family- and relationship-focused approaches to support including adult relationships, finances, parenting and employment support, helping to achieve wellbeing and health outcomes, reducing stress, alleviating poverty and supporting child development	Services and advice are integrated with early-years education, and employment and economic development programmes, targeted to meet people's needs, particularly for lower-income families A universal offer and front door reduces stigma, but a tailored service delivers support people need
Behavioural and relationship parent support	Triple P Positive Parenting Programme , UK Durham Family Initiative , UK	Parenting education, advice and support, connected to access to child healthcare and welfare support		
Community-driven prevention	LA Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project , US	Community-led social network building for relational support among parents, connecting to public service access and job opportunities	Intensive support, including professionals from different services and advice delivered in and out of the home, tailored to individual needs Targeted early-years education especially benefited outcomes in lower-income families	



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