Promoting cohesion in the economic downturn – advice for local authorities

19th May 2009

Angela Mason CBE

National Adviser for Community Cohesion and Equalities

IDeA

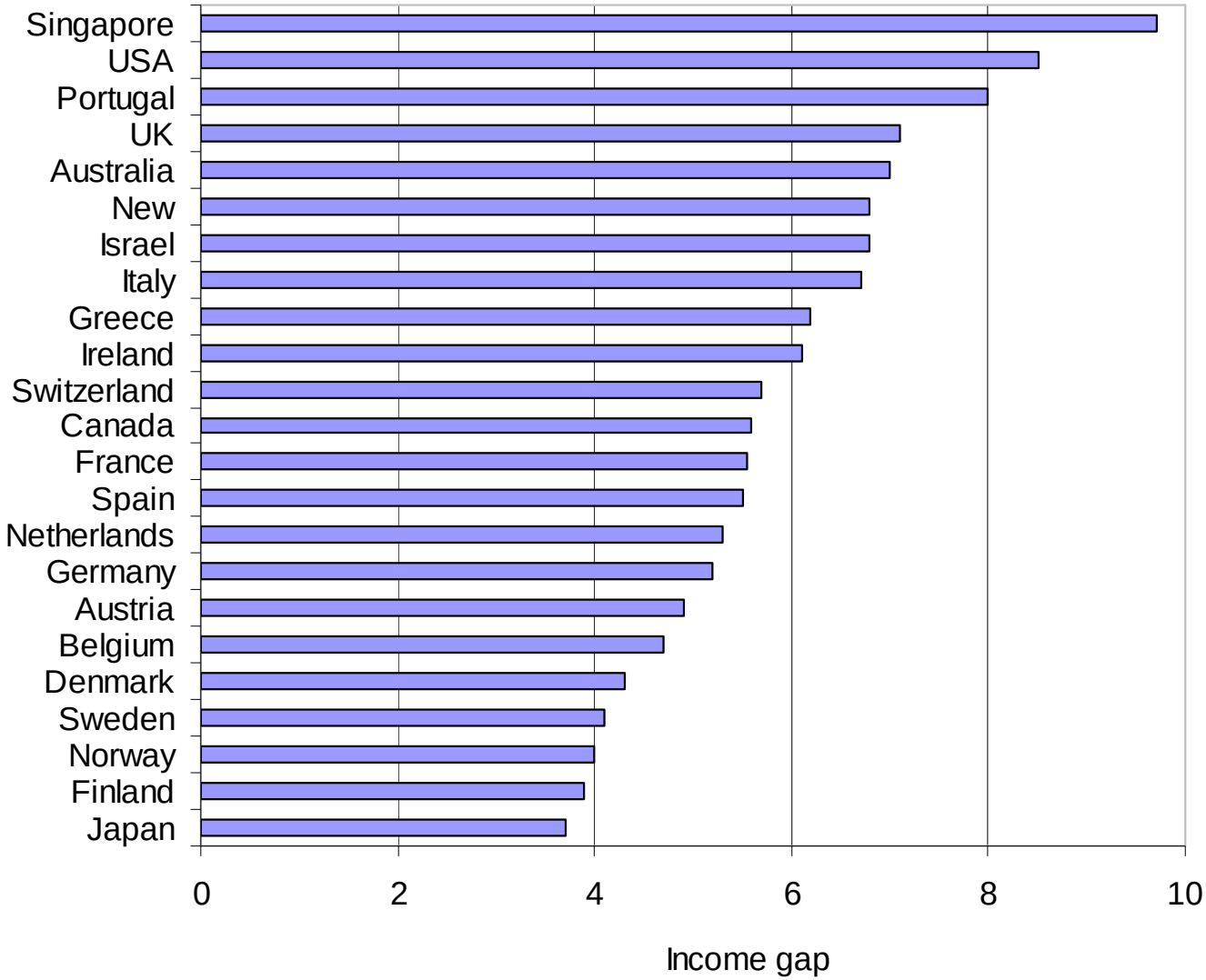
part of the LGA group

Impact of the economic downturn

- Will it increase tensions between communities?
- Will some groups lose out more than others?
- Will spending on equality and cohesion dry up as public spending is cut back?
- Will an anti- establishment populism undermine values of fairness and opportunity?

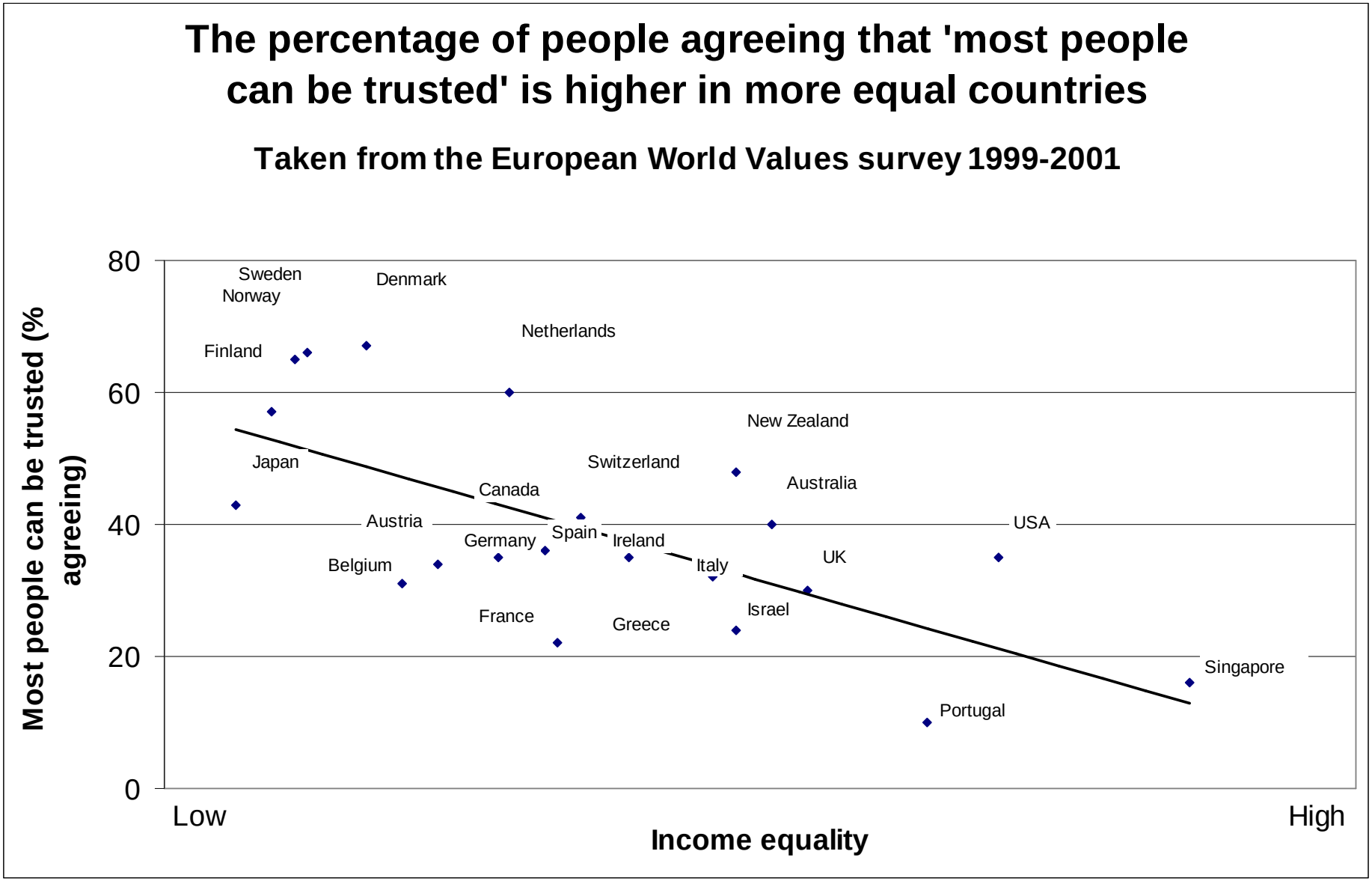
Where are we now?

How much richer are the richest 20 per cent than the poorest 20 per cent in each county?



Taken from "The spirit level – why more equal societies almost always do better", Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2009

Where are we now?

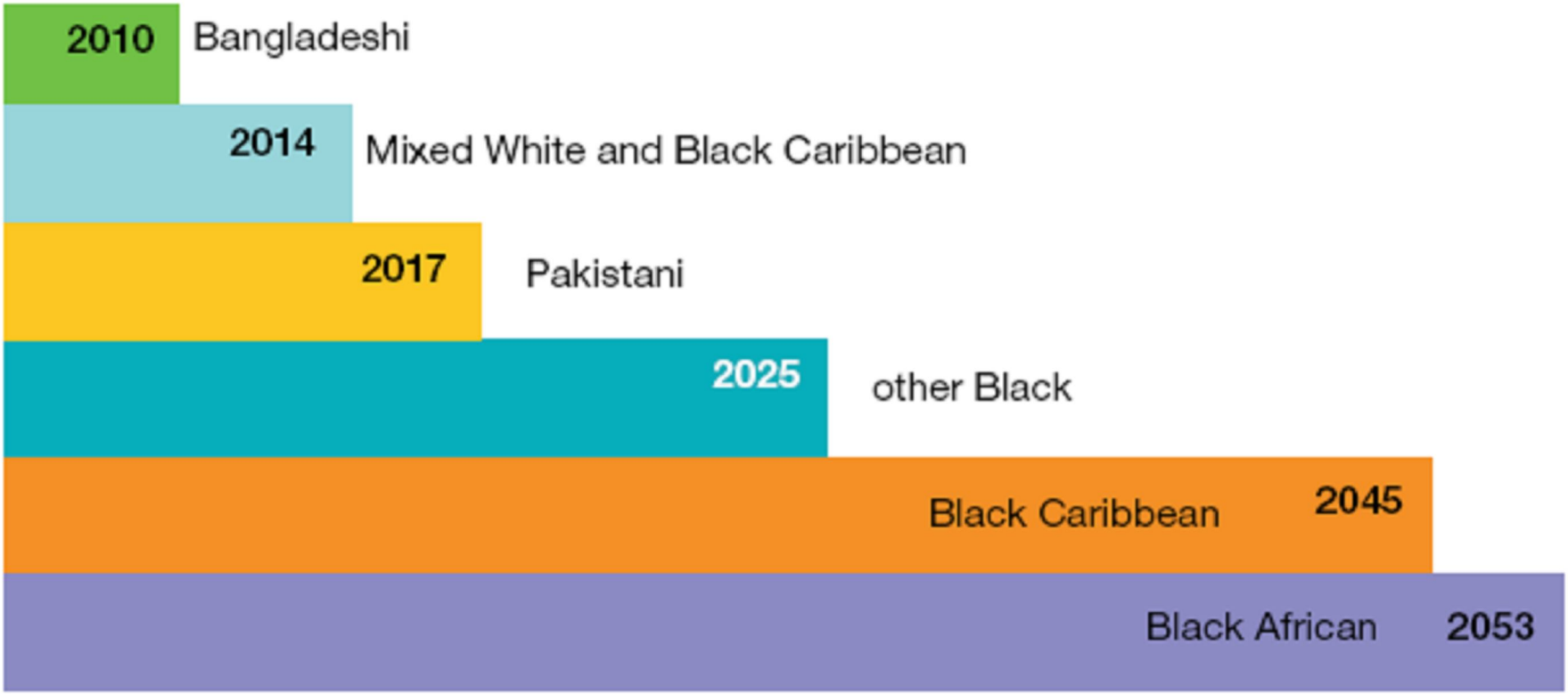


Slow progress to equality

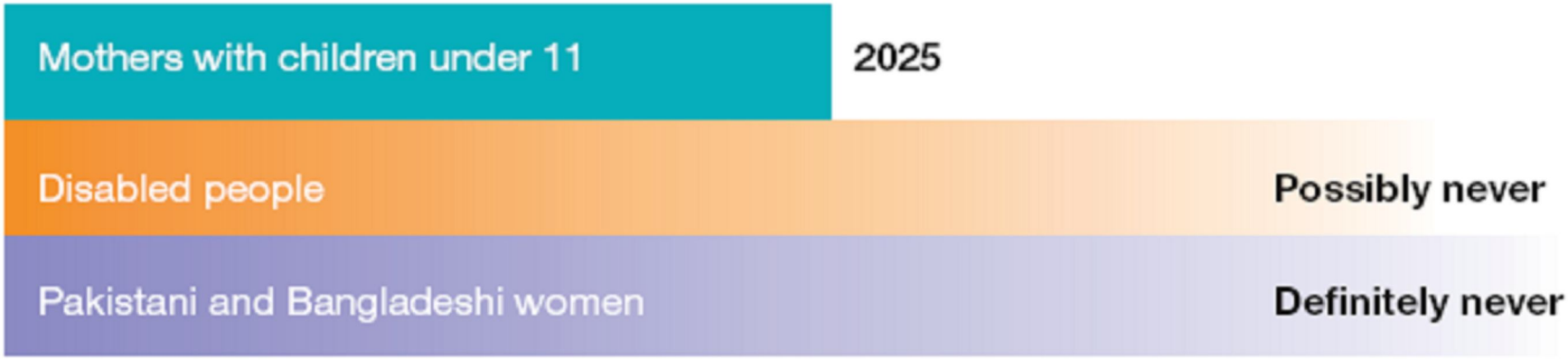
Figure 1.3: Momentum measures 1

At the current rate of change we will:

Momentum measures 2: educational attainment



Momentum measures 3: employment penalties

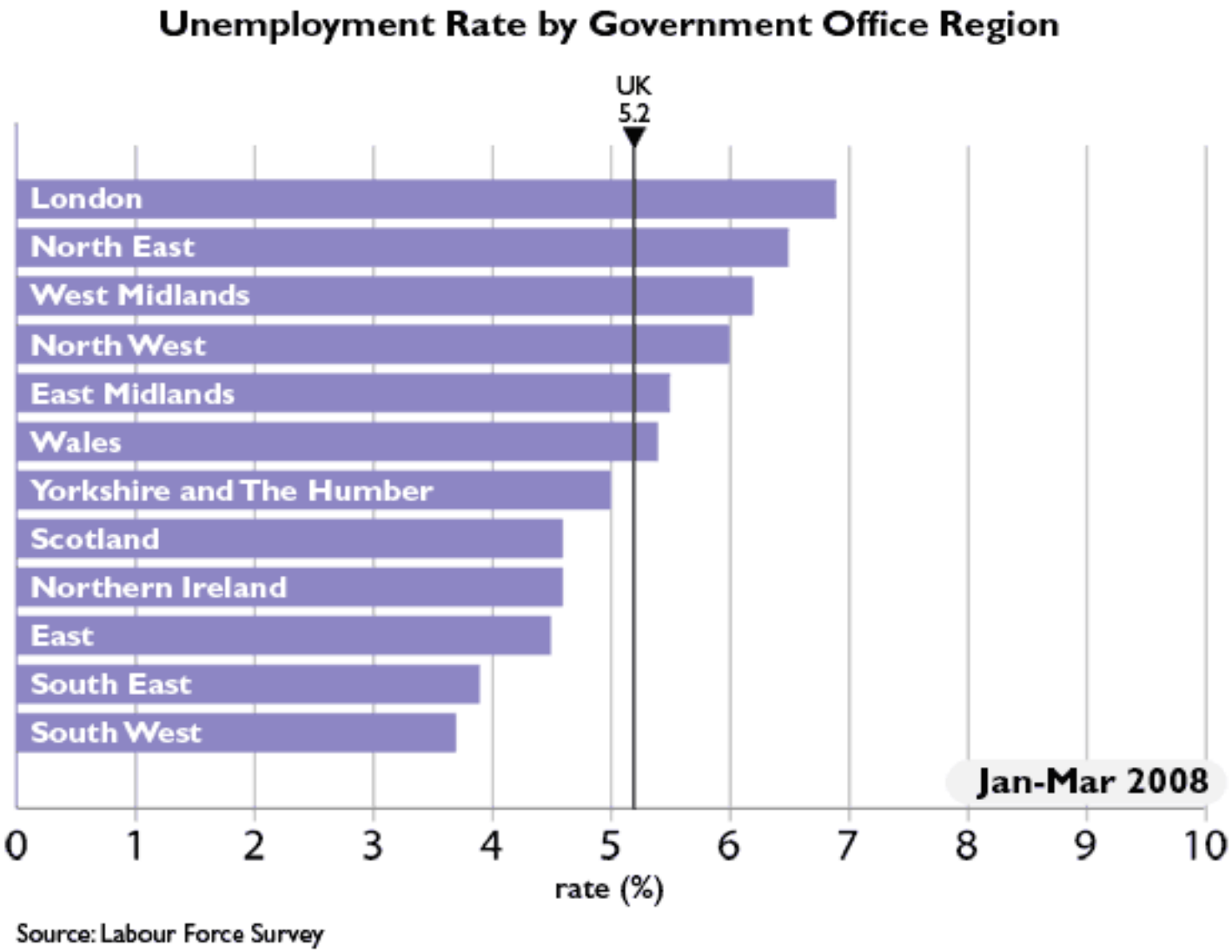


Social capital and economic equality

‘Community and equality are mutually reinforcing. Social capital and economic equality moved in tandem through most of the twentieth century. In terms of the distribution of wealth and income America in the 1950s and 1960S was more egalitarian… those same decades were also the high point of social connectedness and civic engagement. Conversely the last third of the twentieth century was a time of growing inequality and eroding social capital.

Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American Community, 2000

Unemployment biggest threat to cohesion



Refinery workers demonstrating

Rise in support for ‘other‘ parties ‘anti-politician’ feeling

- UKIP 16%, Labour 21%, Lib Dem 14%, Conservatives 26%
- BNP could also win seat in European Parliament
- Also growing support for the Greens

Telegraph/YouGov poll May 2009

Thinking clearly about class and ethnicity – the white working class

- Real danger in overlooking socio-economic inequality and using ‘ethnic’ explanations of deprivation
- Need new language of equality that applies to all sections of society
- ‘Life chances’ definition of equality can measure differential achievement, but implies need for societal solutions

Local councils can provide a lead

How:

- Keep doing what we are doing, community engagement, knowing your communities, working with voluntary sector, tension monitoring, satisfaction surveys, transparent communication on resources
- Role of ward councillors could be particularly important
- Developing with partners and the community a vision for the future of your locality
- Linking recession action plans with neighbourhood, community engagement work – role of cohesion and equality specialists
- Read IDeA's 'No council of despair: positive local leadership in a recession'

Further information available from:

www.idea.gov.uk