

Editorial



Photo @Tameside Reporter, click to see full acceptance speech

GM Poverty Action would like to congratulate the new Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham, who won with almost 2/3 of the votes. During the election campaign he was particularly vocal about his commitment to end rough sleeping by 2020, but [his manifesto](#) had many more pledges that related to action on poverty.

The following policies all appeared in Andy's manifesto, most of which we have taken action on and featured in previous editions of the newsletter:

- Support for the Living Wage and minimising use of zero-hours contracts
- Building affordable homes and working to address the housing crisis
- Action against landlords who fail to adequately maintain properties
- A Good Employers' Charter, setting out the basic standards and actions expected of good businesses
- Strategies to boost skills in adults and teenagers, including workforce development
- Using new transport powers to make bus services more affordable, more reliable and more accessible to disabled people and families with pushchairs
- Support with living costs for specific groups of people such as women affected by retirement-age changes, and young people leaving care
- Championing unpaid family carers and ensuring they are identified and properly supported
- More training and support, better pay and terms of employment, and more opportunities for career progression for social care staff
- Making Greater Manchester the most inclusive city-region in the country on disability issues
- Establishing a GM-wide Fairness Commission to develop plans to tackle inequalities across the city region

Some of these sit completely within the mayor's decision-making powers, while others will require agreement from other leaders. However decision-making is only one kind of power. Spending power is limited, but the combined power of the good will of partners across sectors across the city region will be priceless. GM Poverty Action looks forward to working with the new mayor as a partner, and a bridge to many more partners, in tackling poverty in Greater Manchester.



Tom Skinner

Tom Skinner, Director Greater Manchester Poverty Action

Peter Cruickshank

Peter Cruickshank, our project coordinator and community reporter, has left Greater Manchester Poverty Action to devote more time to studying for his law degree. We want to thank Peter for his hard work for GMPA, his thoughtfulness, positivity and energy. He has spent the last few months interviewing people about their own experiences of poverty and we hope to publish a collection of these conversations shortly. If you would like to contact Peter, please [email Tom Skinner](#) who will pass your message on to him.



GE2017

How do people without a roof over their heads exercise their democratic right to vote on June 8th?

Thanks to organisations like Street Support, the Booth Centre, Salford UCRC, Narrowgate Night Shelter, Project 34, Sash and Salford Council, [here's how](#) all those who are homeless (not just those sleeping rough) can register to vote.

Deadline May 22nd. Spread the word!

As part of the ongoing Work and Wages series, Allison Foreman from Macc's Policy and Influence Team discusses employment rights and the current political environment.

In-work poverty stems from a multitude of factors, including low pay, low in-work benefits for families without children, poor progression opportunities for many in low-paid jobs, a lack of access to services such as good quality childcare and the ongoing gender pay gap. But there is seldom any discussion about the ways in which poor rights at work can lock people into persistent poverty. The UK has a poor track record when it comes to worker's rights – and hard Brexit threatens to make this worse. With a forthcoming general election in June, now is especially a good time to ensure workers' rights are high on the political agenda.

Since so many of our employment laws are derived from European directives, there are real concerns about the way Brexit poses a threat to important workers' rights. There have been mixed messages from key members of the current government on the future of these rights post Brexit.

Will rights be “maintained and enhanced” or will they be chipped away?

No details exist on how much if any European law will be ported into British law. In an attempt to embed the government's commitment to maintaining and protecting rights into law Melanie Onn, MP for Great Grimsby brought a Private Members' bill in the wake of Brexit. She similarly sought to protect workers' rights in an amendment to the bill to trigger article 50, but neither her bill nor her amendment were passed in the House of Commons.

Alongside this, many changes introduced in the last six years have made it easier and cheaper to dismiss workers, denied access to justice by introducing prohibitively high fees to bring cases to the employment tribunal, and reduced workers' ability to organise in the Trade Union Act.

The link between precarious employment and living in poverty is stark.

Those in insecure employment denied the most basic standards of job security, and rights such as maternity leave and protection from unfair dismissal, are far less likely to receive training, more likely to cycle between benefits and work, more likely to have poor health and be at greater risk of poor working conditions. The Fair Work Coalition estimates that [at least 500,000 low-paid workers are in this position](#) and believes that there is no moral or economic justification for the high risks of extreme hardship that these workers and their families face.

While there is a need to improve rights, we also a need to look at how we tackle the denial of rights in the workplace. A great deal of research by [trade unions](#) and others [including Citizens Advice](#) has shown that while some non-compliance stems from a lack of awareness and understanding of the law, much appears to be deliberate, with unscrupulous employers using a range of excuses and tactics to avoid meeting their legal obligations.

Often those affected are unaware of their basic entitlement. Those who are aware find difficulty in asserting their rights for fear of losing their job. It can be a daunting, stressful, time-consuming and costly experience taking your complaint to an employment tribunal, currently the only option open to workers denied their rights. In this context, we need a vision of work which involves improving and enforcing rights without compromising workers' job security.

Pre-election pledges

Labour has [recently announced a pledge to workers](#) including: equal rights to workers from day one, whether part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent; a ban on all zero hours contracts; abolition of employment tribunal fees; an end to unpaid internships and an end to the pay cap on public sector staff.



Allison Foreman

At the time of writing on 4th May, none of the other main parties have revealed their manifesto for improving worker' rights, but it should be noted that [Theresa May's first speech to the Conservative Party Conference as Prime Minister](#) promised that, "as we translate the body of European law into our domestic regulations, we will ensure that workers rights are fully protected and maintained", while the Liberal Democrats and the Greens have also been tending towards arguing for retention of rights that were covered by EU law.

Whoever is elected in June, building towards stronger enforcement through the introduction of a compliance framework is key to ensuring those workers receive security and rights in the workplace. Pledges to enhancing workers' rights will continue to be under the spotlight for the foreseeable future, and the government of the day is likely to be held to account on their commitments.



Why are we failing to feed our own people?

As we prepare for another General Election we expect a further deepening of the division between those who have and those who have not. This will mean the continued exponential growth in the numbers of people requiring emergency food assistance and increased numbers of children and elderly with inadequate food supply.

The most vulnerable

In 2016 [UN data showed](#) that more than 8 million people in the UK were living as food insecure, defined as those who are unable to acquire sufficient food or who have the (regular) uncertainty that they will be able to do so.

From April 2016 – April 2017 [the Trussell Trust alone gave out over 1.82 million 3-day emergency food supplies](#) and the North West needed the largest share: 174,489. While the landscape of the food using charity-sector remains unclear, [we believe that the Trussell Trust now represents less than half of the number of organisations that provide emergency food provision](#) in the UK. Importantly for many organisations who operate a Trussell Trust franchise, along with those organisations who provide emergency food to those in need, other food related activity also occurs alongside emergency provision. For example, a table with surplus food options, holiday activities for children that include meals, low cost cafes. While these activities are often not restricted to those who require emergency food, their co-presence within the same organisation and often at the same time as the emergency provision means that these activities are also available to those receiving such support.

Poor distribution

Looking at these figures one might think the UK is not a wealthy nation. But this is not the case. [Credit Suisse ranked the UK 3rd](#) behind only Switzerland and the US in their 'Wealth per adult among major economies 2016' data but this wealth is not distributed across the population and while rates of employment have increased over the last few years, pay growth has not kept up. The richest fifth of UK households have 40% of the UK income and the poorest fifth, just 8%.

We have already seen cuts in areas such as work programmes that support those with disabilities and reduced funding for local authorities has translated into cuts to programmes that support the most vulnerable.

Disposable income

For those living in poverty in the UK today the amount of disposable income for the poorest fifth of households, [as quoted by the Equality Trust](#), is an average of £185 per week. This is income after state taxes such as income tax and council tax and needs to cover housing, food, travel to work, clothing including uniforms, heating and cooking (cooker, hob or microwave and a fridge), washing, childcare, communicating with others and then what is left can be used for celebrating birthdays, holidays, school trips and socialising.

For many households (not just the poorest), the most flexible item in their budget is food expenditure. We know that when budgets are tight parents skip meals to feed children or select food that will stave off hunger, which is often less nutritious and can be of lower quality.

Obligations made

The government has an obligation to ensure the right for all human beings to be free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, [as specified in a UN covenant](#) to which the UK is a signatory. The UK is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifies a duty to provide "material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition."

If we cannot look to our national government to uphold these rights and obligations, it seems that there is no recourse but to fill the gap from within, something the Conservatives will no doubt continue to bank on. At the time of writing we're still awaiting the 2017 promises so we can only look back to the 2015 manifesto:

"We have always believed that churches, faith groups and other voluntary groups play an important and longstanding role in this country's social fabric, running food banks, helping the homeless and tackling debt and addictions, such as alcoholism and gambling. In the short-term it is evident that the public will need to rely on each other to support the most vulnerable, which includes the elderly and children."

Food banks, community projects and charities operating in a context devoid of adequate government support are not a long-term solution, nor an adequate solution to addressing the need for emergency food.

As citizens, we need to demand that the government meet its UN obligations to ensure the right to food and the rights of the child. We currently have subsidies for winter fuel, transportation, and housing, but there is nothing that ensures food access. **This would require a cross-cutting governmental body, with a minister for food, who ensures that policies enacted through other departments deliver access to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food for all of us, not just the wealthy.**

Written by Megan Blake, Director of the MA in Food Security and Food Justice, University of Sheffield, and a member of GMFA's Food Poverty Special Interest Group



Megan Blake

Forthcoming Events:

Make do and Mend: Explore alternative forms of community-based provision

Thursday June 8th, 2017 from 9am - 4.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

To bring together third sector frontline organisations, community groups, academics and policymakers to discuss the third sector's role in tackling social inequalities and environmental challenges. [More information and book](#)

Brexit, Regulation & Society

Monday June 13th, 2017 from 9am - 5pm at Staff House, Sackville Street, Manchester M1 3AL

The Manchester Centre for Regulation, Governance & Public Law is hosting a free one-day seminar examining the regulatory implications of Brexit for individual citizens across number social spheres. Speakers will consider how Brexit will affect those dependent on law-based social protections, as well as the regulatory role of human rights and international standards in ensuring that such protections are preserved. [More information and book](#)

Human Development Report for Greater Manchester: invitation

On Wednesday June 14th, 2017 from 4—5.30pm at the GM Chamber of Commerce Building, Elliot House, 151 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WD

Report Launch: This report is very timely, as GM appoints its first Mayor the report findings will contribute to current debates on how GM can develop a new, more inclusive and people-centred approach to policy making to address the very high level of deprivation. [More information and to book](#)

Wood Street Mission Queues, Clogs & Redemption Salford

Wednesday June 14th, 2017 5.30—7pm at Salford Museum & Art Gallery



The exhibition focuses on the charity's role sending tens of thousands of children to the seaside in the nineteenth century but what more can be done to promote inclusive growth at a time of growing inequality? [More Info & book](#)

'A Spanish Adventure' Booth Centre Theatre Company

On June 15th & 17th 7.30pm at The Edge Theatre & Art Centre, Chorlton

[More information and to book tickets](#)



United Response's Supported Employment Working Lunch

June 16th, 2017 11am - 1 pm at Lancashire Cricket Club, Old Trafford, M16 0PX



Greater Manchester Supported Employment Services is part of national disability charity, United Response. Through their job coaches, they support adults with disabilities and health conditions to find work, by assessing skills and abilities, matching them to relevant employers and then working with both to achieve reliable, motivated and committed employees. Please join them to find out about their work. [More Info & to book](#)

Any events you'd like GMPA to publicise? [Email us with the details](#)

Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 700 individuals from more than 200 organisations plus Local Authorities and MPs and an increasing number of members of the public.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page. You can also visit our YouTube channel [Community Voices](#)

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

We want to celebrate our successes, find new ways of working together and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region. But we can only do this with your help and support.

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#)

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager: Chris Bagley
T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

NB GMPA does not have full-time dedicated administrative support so please do not expect an immediate response.

