



Greater Manchester Poverty Action response to the Greater Manchester Good Employer second stage consultation

About Greater Manchester Poverty Action and the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign

Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester that works to address poverty across the city region. We convene and network organisations from across the public, private and VCSE sectors to foster collaboration and innovation and to maximise the impact of efforts to address hardship and deprivation across Greater Manchester. We carry out research and we campaign for changes in policy both locally and nationally so that the structural and systematic causes of poverty are addressed.

GMPA hosts the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign (GMLWC). The GMLWC is a coalition of people and organisations who want to make Greater Manchester a Living Wage Zone; to challenge low pay; to put Living Wage policy and a culture of social equality at the heart of how Greater Manchester works.

Background to our responses

We have responded to the questions set out in the consultation below. We wish to make a number of broader points in response to the proposals set out in the consultation document.

1. We welcome the progress that has been made towards the introduction of the charter. We are supportive of the charter as an idea and believe the proposals set out in the consultation document are broadly positive. We agree with the tiered approach and welcome the aspects of employment that will be captured by the charter. However, we are concerned that the potential of the charter may not be realised and would like to see more information on how the charter will be managed and promoted once launched. We would like to see more consideration given to the effectiveness of branding and communication in helping ensure the potential of the charter is realised.
2. The current proposals are overly reliant on the ongoing existence and effective management of other charters and good practice initiatives over which the GMCA has no control or oversight (i.e. those initiatives listed alongside elements of employment listed under 5.19 in the consultation document). There needs to be greater clarity about the relationship between GMCA and those initiatives.
3. The consultation document lists examples of existing support available to employers (box 5.1). Some of the examples listed have a limited footprint in Greater Manchester and there needs to be an acknowledgement that the policy and advocacy ecosystem and level of capacity within organisations to carry out influencing and advocacy work in Greater Manchester is limited.
4. We would welcome further details around the communications and branding that will accompany the charter and how this will be managed beyond the initial launch.
5. We would hope that the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign would be considered to be a Greater Manchester located initiative that is in a position to support employers to address low pay, and that GMPA would be seen as having a role to play in advocating for and promoting initiatives that help to tackle poverty.
6. Linked to points 4 and 5 above, we would like to see GMCA commit to resourcing an independent organisation to advocate for and promote the charter. This could be combined with supporting an independent organisation to maintain oversight of the effectiveness of the charter and ensuring that it remains up-to-date and relevant. With that in mind, it remains unclear what level of resource GMCA will provide towards the ongoing management of the charter.



7. There should be a time limit on Supporter status (e.g. six months), to demonstrate that it is the first step on a journey towards being a good employer, rather than merely a marketing tool. At this point supporters should need to demonstrate how they will achieve Member status and make a commitment to continuous improvement.

Responses to questions set out in the consultation

1. Do you agree that employers should be able to sign up as Supporters of the Charter?

Yes

2. How could Charter Supporters work together to share best practice?

Face to face meetings, linking into existing business networks and making use of existing activity, such as the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign and the work of Business in the Community, would provide opportunities for sharing best practice. This needs to be supported by a central resource and promotional tools so that best practice is shared in respect of areas of employment that are relevant to the charter. There will need to be some level of oversight of best practice sharing in order to measure its effectiveness as a means of increasing good employment practices across the city region.

3. We propose the Charter helps employers find what they need from the range of support that already exists. (Examples given.) What other support are you aware of that should be promoted by the charter?

As discussed under point 3 above, whilst we recognise there are a range of organisations in a position to support employers locally, we are concerned that the Greater Manchester footprint of some of these organisations is limited. We would like to see greater consideration given to how organisations who have spent time giving specific attention to the labour market in Greater Manchester might be brought into the implementation and promotion of the charter. This includes the Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit, Alliance Manchester Business School, sector representative organisations such as Voluntary Sector North West and GMCVO and Greater Manchester Poverty Action.

The GMLWC plays an active role in promoting the real living wage across the city region and provides advice and support to employers on how to move towards Living Wage accreditation. GMPA has actively promoted the need for employers to consider the impact of their employment (and other practices) on poverty. Whilst the resources of both are limited, the benefits of having the support of organisations dedicated to Greater Manchester, are clear.

4. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal for Charter Members?

Agree.

5. Are there any of the six areas, where you think an employer might not be able to meet the aspiration, due to circumstances out of their control?

And

6. If there are circumstances where an employer might not be able to meet the excellent practice due to circumstances out of their control, should they still be able to achieve Charter membership?



Generally speaking charter supporter status should be sufficient for those organisations not able to become charter members. There should be an opportunity for organisations to explain issues outside of their control so that individual cases can be considered.

7. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal for Charter Advocates?

Both agree and disagree. We believe this presents a dual role. We agree that employers at this level should display innovation and delivery against the six areas set out in the consultation document. However, we are not convinced that all employers at this level will have the capacity or capability to undertake effective advocacy of high level employment practices, nor that it will always be appropriate for them to do so.

We are concerned about the blurring of meeting high-level employment standards and being an advocate within this tier. Advocacy and influencing are a skillset in their own right that require careful planning and consideration. Those employers who achieve high quality employment standards should not be presumed to be the best placed organisations to advocate for high quality employment standards to be adopted by other organisations, even if they indicate a willingness to play that role. Whilst there is clearly a place for peer to peer influencing, we reiterate the point made above that GMCA should consider resourcing organisations that have the ability to undertake effective promotion and advocacy in respect of the charter and who have a strong track record of doing so locally. Campaigning organisations and organisations able to bring the voices of people with lived experience to the fore need to have a central role in promoting and advocating for the charter.

A better name for this tier would be Charter Leaders.

10. Where accreditations are not available, or they are difficult to sign up for, how can we assess excellent practice in a way that is simple but robust?

GMCA should resource the development of a toolkit that would allow for annual self assessment and reporting. This would be of minimal cost to GMCA but, if a third party were commissioned to develop and manage this, it could act in conjunction with resourcing an independent organisation to undertake advocacy and promotion of the charter.

11. Do you agree with linking the Employment Charter process with public sector procurement through the Social Value Framework?

Yes.

12. What would be the best ways of measuring the benefits for employers and employees of joining the Charter?

The joint IGAU, JRF, GMPA and Oxfam paper on employment charters (see: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620251/bn-employment-charters-uk-070417-en.pdf;jsessionid=988E539F5FF65254470D79770EBAE248?sequence=1>) showed that there is little evidence that in isolation charters can have a significant impact on changing employer practices. In areas where similar initiatives are already in place ongoing promotion and monitoring of charters has not been sufficiently resourced or designed.



The charter will need ongoing monitoring and evaluation through annual surveys and other methods. There will need to be a method to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of peer to peer influencing between employers across all sectors.

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