

Strengthening local welfare provision – next steps

By Graham Whitham

In December, GMPA launched our [Strengthening the role of local welfare assistance](#) report. The report identifies good practice and recommendations from across the country and considers how these can be applied to local welfare assistance schemes here in Greater Manchester.

Local welfare assistance schemes are an important means through which local authorities can respond to the needs of residents facing a financial crisis. Relatively small interventions delivered through these schemes can help meet a person's immediate needs and prevent them from falling deeper into hardship. However, national research has found that there's often a lack of awareness of schemes, that they are poorly advertised and difficult to access.

In Greater Manchester, where all local councils have schemes in place, there is some existing good practice and a real opportunity to strengthen support in each of our boroughs. Taking the recommendations detailed in the report, GMPA has developed a [checklist for local authorities and their partners](#) to use to assess their schemes and understand what further improvements could be made. Importantly, at a time when local authority finances are coming under even greater pressure, most of the recommendations come at no extra cost.

We are pleased with the engagement we've had on the report to date. This month we held events for elected members, council officers and other stakeholders from across GM, and we'll continue to work with councils and their partners over the course of this year.

Of particular relevance as we (hopefully) begin to recover from the pandemic, is the focus in the report on taking a 'cash first' approach to supporting people. This means that the default way in which someone facing hardship is supported is through a monetary payment rather than in-kind support such as a fuel voucher or food parcel.

Local welfare assistance schemes represent an obvious opportunity for local authorities to adopt this approach as a key role of schemes is to support residents with essential living costs for those in financial crisis, such as buying food or heating their home. Whilst most of the schemes in Greater Manchester offer this support, it is usually in the form of vouchers.

There has been a range of research highlighting the benefits of cash payments over any other form of support for those in financial crisis due to its:

- a) Flexibility, choice, speed and convenience** – vouchers have to be used with certain companies or certain locations or for certain products; cash can be used anywhere and if issued electronically, is available immediately. Vouchers may mean someone having to travel a distance to buy food, costing them money and time, when they could have used their local shop if they had access to cash, benefiting the local economy. There is a much greater risk that vouchers won't be used compared to money.
- b) Preservation of dignity** – having to use vouchers can be stigmatising and may reduce access to the support that residents desperately need.
- c) Administrative efficiency** (when processed electronically) – once an electronic system is set up to pay cash it can be processed quickly and remotely, without the need for face-to-face visits. This approach removes the need to make arrangements with third parties (e.g. voucher providers) further reducing administrative pressures.



Adoption of a 'cash first' approach by local welfare assistance schemes across Greater Manchester would help contribute to addressing the atomisation of poverty that we've seen over the last ten years. You can read more about the importance of this approach in our ['Cash first' briefing](#) and in the [Strengthening the role of local welfare assistance](#) report.

Graham Whitham

Introducing GMPA's new board

We are delighted to announce that we recently appointed four new non-executive directors to the GMPA board. A big thank you to Aileen, Bob, Justin and Rachel for agreeing to join us and help shape the future of GMPA and contribute to our work addressing poverty across the city region.

Bob Boyle

Bob grew up in East Manchester before settling in Stockport, 15 years ago. He has worked in engineering for over 25 years and is currently the Maintenance Manager at a food production facility in Tameside.

Bob's volunteering journey has taken him from being a pension trustee, an Appropriate Adult across Greater Manchester, to Chair of Governors of a Tameside primary school. He is also a member of a Mutual Aid group, helping his neighbours who have been isolating or are vulnerable during the pandemic. Joining us as a non-executive director, Bob is excited to support GMPA in working towards a Greater Manchester free from poverty.



Aileen Edmunds



Passionate about combatting poverty and inequality, Aileen has dedicated her career to creating opportunity so that all people can live a meaningful and fulfilled life.

With more than 15 years' experience in the VCSE sector in causes from homelessness to international development alongside a background in communications and marketing, she brings a wealth of fundraising and service development experience to the Board. Alongside her role as Head of Social Impact at Trafford Housing Trust (where she also manages the Health and Wellbeing Hub, Limelight in Old Trafford), Aileen is currently a Social Impact Project Advisor with Nottingham University and is a Trustee for Emerge 3RS.

Outside of work you will most likely find her scrambling up a hill in walking boots with her dog, Mabel.

Rachel Mather

Rachel is the founder of &mather, an enterprising and growing Bid Management and Research Consultancy headquartered in Leeds.

A strategic, focused professional with a strong research and bid development background, Rachel's led a range of businesses to success by coordinating and developing strategies, goals and funding.

With a career spanning a decade, helping large, SME and VCSE organisations based in the North of England secure over £100m EU and UK grant funding and contracts, Rachel's clients have won contracts from the ESFA, DfE, LEPs, Innovate UK, Local Authorities, Universities, the NHS, Police, Government Agencies, wider public bodies and private sector contracts.



Justin Watson



Justin is Director of children and young people's charity Young Manchester, and has worked in the third sector since 2002, primarily in youth and community development, focusing on participation, engagement and campaigning.

He spent 7 years at Save the Children, leading their youth engagement and campaigning work, supporting a network of young campaigners across the UK to influence at local and national levels, before moving to Oxfam to head up the development of their domestic programme in 2014, focusing on women's economic empowerment, food insecurity and inequality.

Before this Justin ran a number of youth engagement campaigns and outreach projects at community level, supporting the direct provision of youth and play services as well as supporting children and young people to have meaningful involvement in issues that affect them and society more broadly, including climate change, education and rights for asylum seekers and refugees. He is also a trustee of the YPF Trust.

The non-executive directors are joined on the board by Graham Whitham, our Chief Executive Officer, and Tom Skinner, our Chief Operating Officer.

Childcare costs rise as providers struggle to remain sustainable during the pandemic

By Hannah May Parlett, Coram Family and Childcare



Britain's parents are paying 4% more for childcare for children under two, and 5% more for children aged two than they were one year ago, according to the country's most comprehensive annual survey of childcare costs. Coram Family and Childcare's 21st annual Childcare Survey finds that parents have faced childcare costs rising well ahead of inflation and are now paying an average of £138 per week - over £7,000 per year - for a part-time nursery place for a child under two (in the North West the figure is £126.43).

Childcare providers are struggling to remain sustainable during the crisis, with 39% of local authorities in England seeing providers in their area raise their prices and 32% reporting that some providers have reduced the number of free early education entitlement places they offer. Furthermore, 30% have seen providers increase the number of children looked after by each staff member.

Despite over a third (35%) of local authorities in England reporting a rise in the number of providers in their area permanently closing in the last year, the majority have not yet seen an increase in shortages of childcare. Over two-thirds (68%) of local authorities in England reported having enough childcare available to meet demand for parents working full time, compared to 56% last year. However this is most likely to be due to decreased demand from families during the pandemic, rather than increases in the supply of childcare, and it is yet to be seen whether there will still be enough childcare places if, and when demand returns to pre-pandemic levels.

In addition, availability of childcare for certain groups is little improved on last year, with less than one in four local areas in England reporting enough childcare for 12 to 14 year olds (13%), parents working atypical hours (16%) and disabled children (25%). These shortages for disabled children exist despite the fact that fewer disabled children are using childcare - a third (31%) of local areas thought that fewer children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were using childcare than last year.

Megan Jarvie, Head of Coram Family and Childcare, said: "The pandemic has reminded us all of the vital importance of childcare, in enabling parents to work, boosting children's learning and narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. However the crisis has also exacerbated the issues that exist in the sector. For too many families the system simply isn't working, and they are left struggling to make work pay after childcare costs or are forced out of the workplace entirely.

"There remains a risk that many providers could close, leaving more families struggling to find the childcare that they need, or that costs could further increase, at a time when family finances have already been stretched by the pandemic. Financial support from the Government has helped childcare providers to stay afloat, but we don't know what the effects will be when this support ends. We're calling for the Government to take urgent steps to improve the system now and in the longer-term so that every child can access the high-quality childcare that supports their early development."

The Childcare Survey 2021 sets out actions that governments can take in the short-term to fix urgent problems in the system:

- Launch a funding review for the free early education entitlements to make sure that funding levels are sufficient to support the delivery of high-quality education and care, including, but not limited to, issues resulting from Covid-19.
- Reform Universal Credit so it does not lock parents out of work, by increasing the maximum amount of childcare costs paid under Universal Credit and move to upfront payments for childcare.
- Extend the 30 hours free childcare provision for three and four year olds in England and Wales to families where parents are in training, to help boost their employment opportunities.
- Double the early years pupil premium, to boost outcomes for the most disadvantaged children.
- Re-allocate any underspend budget for Tax-Free Childcare to other parts of the childcare system – prioritising the most disadvantaged children.

For a copy of the full report please contact [Emma Lamberton](#), Communications Manager, Coram.



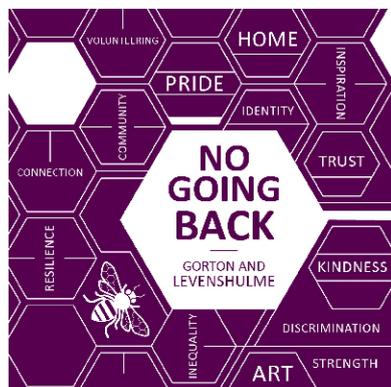
No Going Back

By Helen Walker, Policy & Influence Worker, Macc



Gorton and Levenshulme highlights the need for a radical approach to building resilient communities that can transform people's lives

Representatives of voluntary sector organisations and local groups in Gorton and Levenshulme have shared their experiences and views of working at a neighbourhood level during the Covid-19 crisis in a new Manchester Community Central (Macc) report that was published on Monday March 8th, 2021. Macc is the organisation that supports the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in the city of Manchester.



Entitled, No Going Back: Gorton and Levenshulme, the publication gives a platform to 16 local organisations to highlight some of the local voices in a city neighbourhood that don't often get a hearing. The collection of inspirational stories and quotes focuses on Gorton and Levenshulme, a community area that has faced its fair share of challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We wanted to explore the experience and views of community organisations working in neighbourhoods during the Covid crisis," said Mike Wild, Macc's Chief Executive. "The Gorton and Levenshulme organisations we feature in No Going Back show local communities getting together to organise vital support during the pandemic."

In total, 16 organisations contributed to the report including two community associations, a bowling club, an organisation that teaches circus skills (yes, and you may be surprised why that matters!), a youth service, and an organisation that runs classes to reduce stress. The stories feature work with young people, South Asian women, refugees, migrants, people with dementia and older neighbours. The insight they share covers topics from how to make a new home to how to address health inequalities, how to set up a rapid volunteering scheme, how to organise food banks and why we shouldn't need them.

"The experiences of the local voluntary organisations featured in No Going Back – Gorton and Levenshulme offer a glimpse of how communities can come together to tackle the health and social care crisis in Manchester, a crisis that has been building over the last 20 years and worsened by many years of austerity," said Mike Wild, "It is time to take a truly radical approach, one based in a practical and realistic idea of community, the kind of approach illustrated in every story that is highlighted in this publication," he said.

Mike continued: "It is time to stop remaking the same old solutions in the hope that perhaps they will work this time. The response to the pandemic shows that there are other ways of organising help, support and care in communities: look at the diversity of organisations, of people and approaches in this report. There is an opportunity and an appetite to transform the way that statutory services operate in neighbourhoods so they are able to work alongside local VCSE organisations, faith organisations and businesses and make the best use of the talents, skills and assets of all."

The report is available on [Macc's website](#). You can follow updates on Twitter using the hashtag #NoGoingBackMcr.

Tameside Poverty Truth Commission: Information Session

On Thursday April 1st, 2021 from 10 - 11am

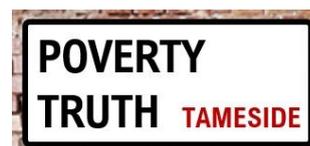
Come along to our information session to find out more about the Poverty Truth Commission and how you can be more involved. There will be a presentation and the opportunity to ask questions and find out more.

Anyone based in (or with relevant contacts in) Tameside can attend, e.g.:

- Individuals who have experienced poverty or are concerned about how poverty affects our community
- Local voluntary, faith and community organisations who are concerned about how poverty affects our community
- Local businesses and enterprises who are concerned about how poverty affects our community

The online session is kindly being hosted by Action Together so please [book here](#) to receive the Zoom link. For more information please contact [Beatrice Smith](#)

The Tameside Poverty Truth Commission is a Greater Manchester Poverty Action programme.



GMPA Convenes Poverty Reference Group to Advise Inequalities Commission

The Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission was launched in October 2020, to support and influence the city-region's renewal following the Covid pandemic. It sought expert advice from a range of pre-existing groups looking at different inequalities. GMPA pointed out the lack of such a group for poverty and socio-economic inequality, so was asked to form the Poverty Reference Group for this purpose.

GMPA invited people from each of GM's ten boroughs to join the Poverty Reference Group. The participants had all been active in projects from across the city region that have sought to influence local decision makers on poverty, including Poverty Truth Commissions, the Elephants Project, Creative Inclusion, the BME Network, GM Coalition of Disabled People, Migrant Help, Support & Action Women's Network, and Legislative Theatre . Through a series of meetings, we explored issues such as economic problems and solutions, and decision-making power and voice. The meetings generated a range of innovative recommendations that were grounded in real world experience of poverty, including how to:

- Reduce barriers to employment, and tackle stigma and bias in recruitment and in the workplace
- Improve job quality, and increase access to education and training
- Listen meaningfully to communities
- Give communities the power to tackle for themselves the problems that affect them



The Commission gratefully received these recommendations, and some Commissioners joined the meetings to hear from participants first-hand. The Commission will be publishing its report on Friday March 26th, 2021. Poverty Reference Group members have been invited to the launch event, and we look forward to seeing a set of recommendations that will help Greater Manchester to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in our society.

Tom Skinner
Chief Operating Officer - Greater Manchester Poverty Action



BARNABUS
Bringing hope to the homeless and vulnerable

Barnabus

Barnabus are looking to recruit a Resettlement Worker. A CV and covering letter should be sent to [Stephen Rowley, Recovery Manager](#). More information is available [here](#). Closing date for applications: Thursday April 1st, 2021

Treasurer (Voluntary)

Are you interested in joining a small but growing organisation? Just Fair are looking for a Treasurer to oversee the governance of Just Fair's financial affairs. Financial experience and qualifications, together with a commitment to social justice and human rights are essential.

This is a voluntary role which can be delivered remotely and flexibly.

For an informal conversation please contact the [Director](#). You can download the application pack [here](#).



For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page.

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

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#) If you would like to submit an article please [get in touch](#) For more information please contact us by [email](#).

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



**GREATER MANCHESTER
POVERTY ACTION**

Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of GMPA. We try to fact-check all articles and events, but if you notice an error please [let us know](#) so we can correct it in a future newsletter.