

2021 in Review

By Graham Whitham – Chief Executive Officer



The year began without a clear sense of what it would hold. A large second COVID-19 wave had taken a grip of the country by the beginning of January and it meant we started 2021 in lockdown.

The ongoing public health crisis resulted in a number of different pieces of financial support, introduced by the Government at the start of the pandemic, being continued. This included the furlough scheme and the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift.

As the lockdown took effect and the vaccination programme accelerated, calls were made to 'get back to normality.' As restrictions eased, focus shifted to the ending of financial protections and the long-term economic consequences of the pandemic. At the same time the rising costs of energy, food and other items increased the financial pressure facing low-income families.



Moving into the autumn, a major campaign supported by GMPA called on the Government to make permanent the vital Universal Credit uplift. Despite this, it was brought to an end at the beginning of October. However, the attention given to this issue resulted in a number of 'concessions' from government, including a reduction in the Universal Credit taper rate, a one-off £500m Household Support Fund (to be channelled through local authorities) and a significant increase in the National Living Wage.

As the economy has opened back up, the signs are that it has held up relatively well. Unemployment hasn't reached the levels expected and a shortage of labour has driven up pay in certain sectors. That said, inflationary pressures remain a major concern as the budgets of low-income households continue to be squeezed and the UK's longstanding labour market challenges of low pay, limited hours and job insecurity are not going away anytime soon. Whilst welcome, the measures aimed at supporting people announced in the autumn do not do enough to compensate for the cut to Universal Credit.

All this means that we, along with others, will continue to call on the Government to ensure that social security adequately supports people as part of a wider plan to end poverty in the UK.



Graham Whitham

At GMPA we continue to work with stakeholders to identify what can be done locally to prevent and reduce poverty. The national context, with poverty rising among households already at greater risk of poverty and in areas where financial hardship is already heavily concentrated, makes that challenging. However, we know from the work of organisations in our network that there is much we can do locally.

The following article sets out the contribution GMPA is making to this agenda, and we are determined to do even more in 2022.

GMPA's work during 2021

During 2021, GMPA has been busy taking forward a number of pieces of work that will contribute to our three strategic priorities, and ultimately towards our vision of a Greater Manchester free from poverty.

GMPA's first strategic priority is **boosting household income and financial resilience** in the city region. As part of this we have been pushing for a cash first approach to local welfare provision.

We have successfully built on the work we [delivered in 2020](#), by encouraging more of our boroughs to make cash payments to household facing a financial crisis. This means prioritising getting money into people's pockets over in-kind support such as food parcels and energy vouchers.



A 'cash first' approach promotes choice, dignity and control. Unlike vouchers, which tend to be restricted to one or a small number of national retailers, cash payments help the local economy by increasing the likelihood of support being spent in local, independent retailers. It has been great to see a number of councils adopting this approach by using extra hardship funding from government to make monetary payments (as opposed to providing vouchers) to Free School Meal eligible families during the school holidays.

We are also helping people access all the financial and other support available to them through our [Referral Tool](#) projects in Tameside and Oldham. This work involves joining up local support services so that people are better able to access support that maximises their household income. In 2022 we will be rolling out the Tool in other boroughs across the city region – watch this space for further details!

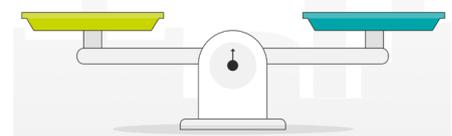


Another element of our work under this priority is the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign. We were really pleased to be able to mark the progress made by the Campaign during Living Wage Week in November. There are now over 400 accredited Real Living Wage local employers and Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, has committed to building on this and creating a Real Living Wage City Region.

Our second priority is to **ensure stakeholders in Greater Manchester embed a strong strategic approach to tackling poverty**. This work involves supporting local authorities and their partners to put in place ways of preventing and reducing poverty in their area, identifying the levers and mechanisms required to ensure policy responds to poverty in an impactful and joined up way. It means each borough should have a robust anti-poverty strategy in place.

One element of this is encouraging local public bodies to adopt the [socio-economic duty](#). This is about actively taking into account the impact of policy and practice on people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. [Our guide](#), written with Just Fair and endorsed by a wider coalition of organisations, sets out how the duty can be voluntarily implemented and adopted locally. It is great to see a number of our boroughs, including Salford and Wigan, putting the duty into practice.

Local adoption of the socio-economic duty can contribute to a 'levelling up' agenda.



As part of this work we have also established a local authority officers forum. This brings officers leading on poverty from each of our ten boroughs and from the Combined Authority together to discuss strategic and policy responses to poverty. A big thank you to officers who have engaged in the forum to date.

At a Greater Manchester level, we were pleased to see a number of the policies GMPA has been calling for adopted in the report of the [Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission](#). Being clear about the role the Combined Authority and other city region-wide organisations and institutions can play in addressing socio-economic inequalities will be vital if we are to prevent and reduce poverty over the coming years.

GMPA's work during 2021 continued

One of the recommendations in the Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission report aligns with GMPA's third strategic priority to **embed the voices of people with lived experience of poverty in the decision-making structures and systems of Greater Manchester**. The Commission recommended a Panel should be established for people with lived experience of poverty to inform policy and practice at a city region level on an ongoing basis.

This would build on the temporary Poverty Reference Group GMPA established to support the Commission's work at the start of 2021. The Reference Group involved bringing people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage, who have been involved in engagement and participation activities at a borough level, together to discuss what we can do to tackle inequalities in Greater Manchester.

As part of our work on this strategic priority we launched the [Tameside Poverty Truth Commission](#) in November. Over the next 11 months, local civic and business leaders and people with lived experience of poverty (the Commissioners) will come together to identify local responses and solutions to poverty.

**POVERTY
TRUTH TAMESIDE**

As we end the year, a big thank you to our funders. Without their support, none of this work would be possible. We have been able to grow the team, bringing in a Fundraising Officer and Policy Officer and resource the Tameside Poverty Truth Commission. We are also grateful to our [Principal Partners](#), who continue to provide support to the organisation. GMPA would not exist without their contributions.

Wishing everyone a restful and happy festive season – the GMPA Team.



Help for people sleeping rough

Information about the plans for helping rough sleepers in Greater Manchester over the winter (December to March) is available [here](#).

If you are concerned about someone you have seen sleeping rough, you can use [this website](#) to send an alert to StreetLink. The details you provide are sent to the local authority or outreach service for the area in which you have seen the person, to help them find the individual and connect them to support. Please note: if you think the person is under 18 don't contact StreetLink but instead call the police.

[Street Support website](#) - on this website you will find information about organisations that provide food, facilities, clothes and other personal items as well as help finding accommodation, or simply someone to talk to. Please check with any organisations directly before visiting.



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.



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