

Decent Work and The Real Living Wage Post Covid

By John Hacking

Greater Manchester (GM) went into the Covid-19 crisis as one of the fastest growing economies in the UK and will most likely come out of it in recession.

What does this mean for the campaign for decent work for all workers in GM in general, and the campaign for a Real Living Wage in particular?

It is likely that the economic impact on the GM economy will not be uniform across sectors.

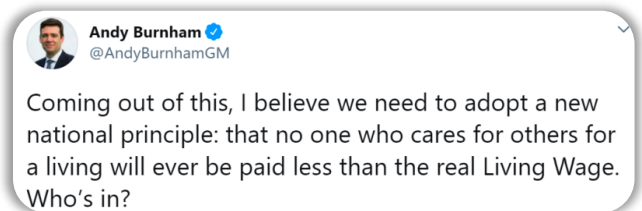
The health and care sector in particular will continue to have a huge focus placed on it and there is clearly an increased sense of social solidarity and support for key workers in this sector and others such as transport and local municipal services across the wider population. This will provide opportunities to protect the progress that has been made in tackling low pay amongst these workers and to press for improved job quality and pay.

There are, however, other sectors where low pay has traditionally been a problem in Greater Manchester.

Businesses in the 'foundational economy' and particularly those in retail and hospitality will be very adversely affected, with knock on consequences for their employees, most of whom are unlikely to have earned the Real Living Wage even before the Covid-19 crisis. This will not be uniform across the conurbation, as areas that have a larger number of workers in these types of businesses will be more heavily affected.

The response that we make as the Greater Manchester Poverty Action and as the GM Living Wage Campaign will be affected by these changing circumstances. We will need to work with our partners in the Trade Unions, the Local Authorities and other public sector bodies and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector to ensure that 'we hold what we have' in terms of gains made in the past. In addition, we will need to find ways of working together to ensure that we meet the challenges ahead with a well-formed strategy and a sense of common purpose and energy.

GM Mayor Andy Burnham has said that government support for business should be linked to the introduction of better employment standards, including a Real Living Wage. This 'Build Back Better' approach is one that needs to shape the economic response across GM and nationally.



The timing and nature of the emergence from the crisis is unknown. The full scale and nature of the economic impact is unknown. The toll on wellbeing and mental health conditions of workers is unknown.

Even given all these unknowns we should start to think and plan for the challenges and opportunities ahead for our campaign and the aspirations of our partners and supporters.



With this in mind GM Living Wage Campaign will be holding a 1 hour online Think Session at 2pm on Wednesday May 13th, 2020. The session will be informal and will focus on thoughts and ideas for the post Covid-19 period both short and long term. If you want to take part please [contact me](#)

Best Wishes and Stay Safe.

John Hacking,
Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign Coordinator

Assessing the Government's Food Measures During COVID-19

By Tom Skinner

A Parliament inquiry last week [called for evidence on COVID-19 and food supply](#). I was asked to help Greater Manchester's response to this call, answering the question, "Are the Government and food industry doing enough to support people to access sufficient healthy food; and are any groups not having their needs met? If not, what further steps should the Government and food industry take?" Here is what I wrote:

Central Government efforts to provide food for up to 1.5m extremely vulnerable people shielding from COVID-19 is welcome, although there have been challenges around ensuring local authorities are fully aware of who is in receipt of support from the government's scheme. This has made it difficult to ensure local responses are coordinated and complementary to the national scheme.

The biggest concern however is that the number of people in need far exceeds that list, both because the criteria [exclude some people who have serious health conditions](#) (there should be a larger semi-shielded list of people who, even if they turn down or are ineligible for food packages from the Government, are still prioritised for other services and access to supermarkets), and because they don't consider low income or other related socioeconomic factors. [More than three million](#) people reported going hungry in the first three weeks of the UK's COVID-19 lockdown alone. [Greater Manchester Poverty Action's own survey](#) of food support providers early in the COVID-19 crisis showed increased demand for their services, but concerns about the food supply and a major decrease in volunteer capacity that will have worsened further since the lockdown started.

The £3.25m grant for redistributing surplus food has helped to allay some of the worst fears about food supply to public sector and VCSE food providers, but food banks in several areas of Greater Manchester have still been running dangerously low on supplies and have had to buy food in, either depleting their own cash reserves or relying on bailouts from their local authorities. This financial hit compounds the impact of austerity in which those councils with the most financially vulnerable populations also experienced the [harshest cuts](#), and there is significant concern that the "Fair Funding Review" could continue or even accelerate that trend. These concerns about local authority and voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) finances in Greater Manchester risk undermining the city region's determination to provide for all of its citizens and to transition out of this crisis with a shared approach to reducing food poverty. A commitment to bolster funding for councils in the future, to meet the needs of their low-income and other vulnerable households (including but not limited to ring-fenced and better funded Local Welfare Assistance Schemes) is a missing pillar of the Government's COVID-19 response.

Household income itself remains a barrier to accessing food, despite many welcome moves from the Government – the furlough scheme, the end of the benefits freeze, the increase in support through Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit and the extra funding to councils to meet increased demand for support with paying council tax. The removal of the requirement for Healthy Start applications to have a signature from a health worker is welcome, and we encourage the Government to move as quickly as possible to launching the system for online applications, as well as setting targets to increase uptake.



However the 5 week wait for Universal Credit continues to increase household food insecurity, as does the 2-child limit. We also advocate substantially increasing Child Benefit and scrapping the benefit cap that limits the total amount of support a household can receive through the benefit system.

Tom Skinner
Director, GM Poverty Action



Rochdale support for low income families



Rochdale Council has announced up to £500,000 of support to help families with children hardest hit by the coronavirus crisis. Around 5,000 households with children receiving means tested free school meals will receive an emergency Aldi voucher.

The scheme provides £65 of Aldi vouchers for families with one child, whilst families with two or more children will receive £130 in vouchers to spend on groceries and household essentials. Rochdale Council anticipates that all vouchers will have been received by residents by the beginning of the second week in May at the latest and the majority will receive them much earlier.

Rochdale have also implemented Local Community Response Hubs in each of the townships to support the most vulnerable residents. As of April 24th, the Rochdale helpline number had received 1063 calls, 783 of which were referred to the Hubs. 56% of calls to the Hubs were from residents aged 60 and over, with 38% being for the over 70 age group. The main query relates to provision of emergency food and support for weekly shopping.

The new voucher scheme will not disadvantage other groups, but will free up resource in the hubs to help those that fall into the high risk category, who must self-isolate including older people, those with disabilities and carers.

This does not impact on the free school meals voucher scheme that schools are managing separately.

As with all boroughs, Rochdale will also provide help if residents are struggling to pay Council Tax, and Discretionary Housing Payments are available to help anyone who receives Housing Benefit that doesn't fully cover the rent. Find out more about these and all the other support available on their [website](#) or call on 0300 303 8870

COVID-19 and families on a low income: poverty in the pandemic - Nuffield Foundation

A [new project](#) is getting underway this month, looking at how families on a low income navigate and experience COVID-19, while also tracking the social security response. A key part of this project will be to create a hub where people doing research on poverty and social security can together explore how to ethically and sensitively conduct research during the pandemic. They will also work with a smaller group of research teams to aggregate and share findings from projects as they relate to COVID-19 and poverty within families.

Other elements of the project include collaborative work with CPAG using their Early Warning System, economic modelling of policy proposals, and participatory research in partnership with families themselves to document and share their experiences during this time. They will be looking to find families to participate in the project in the coming weeks and months.

For further information please check out the [website](#) or contact: [Ruth Patrick](#) and [Maddy Power](#) from the University of York, [Kayleigh Garthwaite](#) from the University of Birmingham and the [Child Poverty Action Group](#)

Supporting Tameside families during COVID-19



Life may feel strange at the moment and very overwhelming, especially when it comes to eating healthily on a budget.



The Children's Nutrition Team will be offering advice and top tips to help you and your family cope with the current situation and will continue to provide healthy recipes, simple snack ideas, and general nutrition tips.

£15 free school meal government scheme: The team are also offering a 5 day meal planner to support families managing lunchtime budgeting and meal planning. Ask your Tameside school or visit the web link below for a copy of the planner.

Check out the [website](#) for more information and follow us on twitter @NHSTamesideCNT

Recruiting a Food Poverty Coordinator

Following the launch of the [Greater Manchester Food Poverty Action Plan](#) last year, we have the opportunity to shape Greater Manchester's food poverty response.



GMPA is looking to recruit a confident and dynamic coordinator to help implement the Action Plan. The Coordinator will initially support coordination of the COVID-19 food provision and will also work with a longer-term perspective towards our vision of a joined-up system aimed at preventing food poverty.

The deadline for applications is 5pm Thursday May 21st, 2020 and interviews will take place online on June 2nd and 3rd, 2020.

Please download the [job description](#) and [application form](#), consider applying, and share this exciting opportunity through your networks.

Energyworks at Groundwork

Energyworks at Groundwork Greater Manchester are offering telephone support to those who are self-isolating or vulnerable.



Support includes: switching suppliers, free boiler replacements for broken boilers (owner occupiers only), capping water rates and freezing payments where eligible, metering issues, pre-payment meter advice – how to top up, where to top up, possible preloaded cards sent to the resident by their energy provider where eligible, how to keep your home warmer for less and more.

Please call or text 0161785 7417, 0161 785 7416 or 07739635453 [find out more here](#)



Greater Manchester Combined Authority online support or assistance form

An online form has been developed to help record offers of aid and/or requests for assistance across Greater Manchester in relation to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Any organisation, business or individual who has an offer of support to make is asked to complete the online form. Equally any organisation that is in need of support or assistance must also complete the form.

Once the form is completed, you may receive a response using the contact details provided. However, they will only respond to an offer of assistance where they can usefully utilise the offer. Please provide as much information as possible so that those responding can do so efficiently. The online form can be accessed [here](#). Requests submitted via this form are monitored Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm only.

The Coronavirus outbreak and how it relates to GMPA's work

As the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak impacts people's lives across the city region, our small team at GMPA will be doing what we can to highlight consequences of the virus on people experiencing poverty and on efforts to tackle poverty.

GMPA ran two surveys to understand the initial impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on parts of our network. The findings from both surveys have been passed on to key stakeholders and the main findings are available on our [webpage](#) which also provides links to many useful resources including the local authority hubs, National agencies and VCSE infrastructure organisations.

Please take every possible care and thank you for all that you are doing.



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.

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.