

Review of 2020

It has been a tough and challenging year for people across Greater Manchester. The pandemic has had huge short-term consequences for the city-region, and the economic and health effects will last long beyond 2020.

Everyone has had to adapt to multiple and changing demands during this year. This has been no less true for us at Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA). We can say confidently that GMPA has shown its value to Greater Manchester, helping shape responses to hardship caused by the pandemic and informing the ongoing fight against poverty. We have been able to engage in COVID-19 related work, and at the same time taken forward key pieces of our 2020 workplan (recruiting to the Food Poverty Programme Coordinator role, running the GM Living Wage Campaign, working towards a Poverty Truth Commission in Tameside, publishing the GM Poverty Monitor and launching our report on local welfare assistance schemes).



This short newsletter looks back over some of our work during 2020. As we head into 2021, we'd like to wish you all the best for the festive season. We hope you get the chance to have a rest and that you stay safe.

Best wishes,
The GMPA Team.



Strengthening the role of local welfare assistance

Local welfare assistance schemes, operated by local authorities across England, play an important role in responding to the needs of people facing a financial crisis, and help to prevent people reaching a crisis in the first place. However, there's been limited policy discussion about how the effectiveness of these schemes could be maximised.

GMPA's new report (released last week) – [*Strengthening the role of local welfare assistance*](#) – identifies a series of recommendations for local authorities and their partners in Greater Manchester to adopt. The report draws on good practice from both within and outside the city region.

Average per capita funding for local welfare provision in **England** is **£0.73** compared to **£6.49** in **Scotland**.



Visit our [website](#) to download the report, the tools developed to support implementation of the recommendations and to listen to the report author Simon Watts discussing the recommendations with our Chief Executive Graham Whitham.

In 2021 we'll be working with councils and others across the city-region to implement the key findings.

Delivery during COVID-19

As a result of the pandemic GMPA has focussed on the immediate crisis caused by COVID-19. Whilst we are still working towards our vision of a city region free from poverty, we have had to adapt our workplan for 2020. During this period we focused our delivery on the following areas:

- Gathering intelligence from food banks, food pantries/clubs and meal providers. This information has been used by the GMCA, GM Health and Social Care Partnership and each of the ten GM boroughs to coordinate food provision and support. Specifically:
 - GMPA has been advising how to support residents on low incomes who would usually access support through services that have had to close or adapt their operations. We are using the intelligence described above to inform this work.
 - Maintaining [online maps](#) of food aid providers and other support services available to people on low incomes. The food providers map has received 21,000 hits since the beginning of March.
- Maintaining an understanding of how local authorities, the GMCA and other stakeholders are supporting people experiencing poverty. Specifically we have:
 - Shaped the Equality Impact Assessment tools developed by local authorities to assess the impact of community responses (the provision of food, access to prescriptions and other welfare support) to the pandemic on different groups of the population. We developed a [policy briefing](#) and presented this to the GM Humanitarian Assistance Group in April. The briefing focussed on ensuring socio-economic status/poverty was included within the Equality Impact Assessment tools and explained how this could be done and the issues that should be taken into account. This was taken up by local authorities as a result of our work.
 - Supported local authorities in allocating additional hardship funding from central government to people struggling financially during the pandemic. This included developing a [policy briefing](#) and presenting it to the GM Humanitarian Assistance Group. This focussed on maximising choice, dignity and control for recipients of local welfare support and considering how it could best meet immediate needs whilst also addressing the underlying causes of poverty.



Greater Manchester Poverty Monitor 2020

In October we launched an updated and improved [Greater Manchester Poverty Monitor 2020](#) detailing some of the key statistics relating to poverty across the city region. The aim of the Monitor is to support policymakers and practitioners to understand levels of poverty in their area to help inform and shape responses to the issue.

The Poverty Monitors revealed that prior to the pandemic:

- 620,000 people were living in poverty;
- 200,000 children were in households with an income below the poverty line;
- 157,000 households were experiencing fuel poverty;
- Around a quarter of a million people were claiming help towards housing costs;
- 20% of all jobs in Greater Manchester were paying less than the Real Living Wage.

The Monitor also found signs that already high levels of poverty in the city region are likely to have got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits in GM rose by 93% between March and August 2020.
- There has been a sharp increase in the number of people claiming Universal Credit in each of the city region's ten boroughs.



In response to the findings of the Monitor, GMPA back national calls on the government to:

- Introduce a UK wide anti-poverty strategy
- End the two-child limit on benefits and the benefits cap
- Boost Child Benefit payments, and
- Make permanent the Universal Credit uplift introduced at the start of the pandemic.

GMPA Programmes

Food Poverty Programme:

- We recruited Dr. Sian Mullen to the Food Poverty Programme Coordinator post in June 2020;
- We are developing two pilot projects in Tameside and Oldham that approach the issue of food poverty from an advice and cash first approach;
- In addition to the contribution to GM's food poverty Covid-19 response, we helped convene and run the GM Food Cell and the GM Food Operations Group;
- We are also leading on the development of the food poverty section of Good Food Greater Manchester's Good Food Vision;
- We submitted evidence to Parliament's "[COVID-19 and food supply](#)" committee, and produced several other briefings for GM local authorities' food and humanitarian leads on issues such as [Healthy Start Vouchers](#).

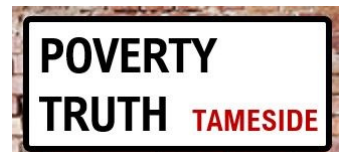
Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign:



- We have continued to meet online as a campaign group through the Covid-19 pandemic, chaired by Campaign Coordinator John Hacking;
- We ran or contributed to several events and meetings through the year, especially during Living Wage Week in November, engaging key employers and making the case for the Real Living Wage;
- We have supported Salford's, Oldham's, and Manchester's bids to become Living Wage places;
- Greater Manchester announced its ambition to become the first real Living Wage City Region in the UK. We are offering our experience, assistance and support to achieve that ambition as soon as possible.

Tameside Poverty Truth Commission:

- We recruited facilitators Beatrice Smith in April and Lizzie Bassford in December 2020;
- We are bringing in the funds necessary to commit to the Commission, and are recruiting commissioners, with the aim of launching in summer 2021.



Help for people sleeping rough



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. It is important to note that if you think the person you are concerned about is under 18 that you don't contact StreetLink but instead call the police.

[Street Support website](#) - on this website you will find information about organisations that provide advice, meals, washing facilities, health advice, personal items such as clothes, toiletries and sanitary products, help finding accommodation, food parcels or simply someone to talk to. Many of the services offered are changing rapidly as everyone responds to the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus crisis, so you must 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.

