

Editorial

This is our last newsletter ahead of the General Election on 8th June. The election is taking place in the shadow of the horrific events of 22nd May at Manchester Arena. Our original editorial, drafted prior to 22nd May, is set out on the following page.

Following the terrorist attack, Greater Manchester Poverty Action wishes to send its condolences to the victims and their families.

Greater Manchester Poverty Action believes in the power of people and of communities to come together to overcome challenges. This has never been better illustrated than in the aftermath of the attack on concert goers last week. The emergency services showed incredible courage and professionalism in the most trying of circumstances. Members of the public helped strangers, supporting people who were injured, disorientated and in shock.

In 1996 a bomb tore through Manchester city centre. It caused major damage to our city centre but miraculously nobody was killed. Last week we weren't so fortunate.

The legacy of the 1996 bomb was a concerted and ultimately successful effort to rebuild the city centre, to make it a more attractive place to businesses, residents and visitors. Out of the destruction came something positive.

Nothing will take away the pain being felt by those who have lost loved ones, but if there's any group of people in the world with the ability to build something positive out of the tragedy of 22nd May it is Mancunians. Doing so is the most effective way of defeating hate.

Manchester is a wonderful city. It is at the beating cultural heart of the nation and it is the birthplace of the modern world. It is where new ideas and innovation spring from.

Yet, we know that across Greater Manchester there are too many people who have fallen on hard times. This city region has the ideas and the passion to change the world, to do things better and to do things differently. We've done it before, and we'll do it again.

Just as it did in 1996, a positive legacy must emerge from the tragic events of last week. Greater Manchester Poverty Action will continue to work with others to make this city-region an ever-better place to live and to make sure the benefits of living here are felt by all. We know that our resolve, and the resolve of everyone from every part of Greater Manchester, will not be broken by mindless acts of violence.

You can donate to the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund British Red Cross appeal [here](#).



Tackling poverty and the value of benefits

by Graham Whitham



Poverty is a problem that has worsened in recent years, not just in terms of the numbers of people experiencing poverty but in the way that poverty manifests. In Greater Manchester we have seen a significant rise in the number of people who are homeless, with 3,292 people in the city region 'surviving without a home' and many more living in temporary accommodation. People are increasingly reliant on food handouts from emergency food providers.

Whilst there's much we can do in Greater Manchester to address the issue, it is central government policy which has the most direct impact on people's living standards and on levels of poverty. Whoever forms the new government after the General Election they will have to get to grips with deeply entrenched levels of poverty in the UK and take steps to stop poverty increasing over the coming years.

The reasons why poverty exists in Greater Manchester, and in the UK as a whole, are well understood; high living costs, a housing market that is incapable of meeting everyone's needs, a broken social security system that fails to provide a sufficient safety net and an economy that relies too heavily on insecure and low paying work in order to function are all among the structural factors that result in people experiencing poverty and hardship.

The party manifestos all suggest measures that go some way to addressing some of these factors, but none of them presents a comprehensive strategy for tackling poverty. In particular, there isn't enough of a focus on recognising the importance of the value of benefits. As the IFS have shown, it is the failure of benefits, particularly benefits for those of working age, to keep pace with the cost of living that has the greatest impact on levels of poverty over time. Yet the value of benefits relative to earnings in the UK is among the lowest of the developed nations.

This isn't a new problem, with the value of certain benefits no longer reflecting what is needed to meet living costs. For example, since the 1970s the value of unemployment benefit has failed to keep up with changes in the cost of living. In 1948, unemployment benefit and the state pension were set at the same value. The level of the basic pension is now more than 50% higher than Job Seeker's Allowance and this gap is likely to grow over coming years.

The fall in the real terms value of working-age benefits over a number of decades has coincided with a shift in public attitudes. Public support for spending on benefits generally, and on some specific benefits, has fallen considerably since the early 1980s. Moving to a place where we have a social security system that is effective at driving down poverty requires political will, but also a shift in public attitudes so that support for increases in benefits gets the buy-in from the public it needs to ensure improvements to the social security system are sustainable. Or to put it another way, politicians are less likely to cut, and more likely to increase, social security benefits if there's widespread public support for them.



Graham Whitham

With a new mayor and new powers in place in Greater Manchester there is a real opportunity to do things differently here and to act as a beacon to the rest of the country, identifying effective ways of tackling poverty and improving living standards. However, national government policies must not just complement these efforts but provide the framework and conditions for a poverty free UK.

This has to include an improvement in the value of benefits.

As part of the ongoing Work and Wages series, Ingun Borg from the University of Sheffield writes about the concept of employment progression, how it is defined by lower-income people, and whether Universal Credit might be helping people to progress.

In recent months, the concepts of inclusive growth and employment progression have been at the forefront of the debate on how to improve the lives of people in all areas of Manchester. But, what does progression really mean? And does it mean the same to those making the policies and to those experiencing them in their everyday life?

I am doing research with people responsible for making employment progression policies and with people subject to them. Although the research is not finished, there is a strong similarity in what policymakers want in terms of their own progression and what most people in low-income want. In short, they all want a decent job; that pays a fair wage for the effort and skills they provide; gives them freedom and control and that allows a sense of balance between work and home life.

However, that is not what the same policymakers suggest in the Government's flagship welfare reform Universal Credit (UC) now widely delivered across Greater Manchester. In UC in-work progression is described as 'earning more' and thereby 'becoming self-sufficient and ultimately independent of the welfare state'. Nowhere does the policy discuss the quality of work, or the availability of decent work locally. This narrow understanding is at odds with a more common understanding of progression as improvements in pay and/or conditions. In fact, many people in low pay frequently say that to them progress would be to have a 'steady job'.

Even having a steady job may not be enough to escape poverty or 'become independent of the welfare state'. The UC policy does not offer support for people to increase their skills through training or education and childcare support is only available to those already in formal paid work. So although people may feel they are indeed doing the right thing – by working – the Government is in effect saying that they are not doing *enough* of the right thing. Therefore, to avoid being sanctioned they will in reality have the choice of (a) finding a new job with the required hours/earnings, (b) increasing the hours in their current (low-paid) job or (c) finding an additional job on top of their current job(s).

UC has been introduced across the North West region since 2013 and there are now 106,000 people in the region claiming this benefit. Around half are female and in the ten GMCA localities there are currently more than 37,000 families who are likely to be subject to the in-work progression policy now or in the near future.

How families will solve the issue of progression on a practical and local level - and what they think about it - is the next stage of my research. If you or anyone you know have been told to find more work by the Jobcentre or other employment agencies, please contact me via email on lborg@sheffield.ac.uk or on 07599 502 158 .



Ingun Borg



Questions for your GE2017 candidates

GM Law centre has gathered questions for GE2017 candidates from members and supporters. They would like you to write or speak to the candidates in your area to ask them these and your own questions about legal aid, welfare, housing and immigration. They have collected contact details for all candidates, so you can [find out who to contact in your area here](#).

- If elected, would you vote for the restoration of legal aid?
- Harsh sanctions have been imposed on benefit claimants. Would you be willing to speak out and vote against these?
- Benefit restrictions have particularly affected people with disabilities? Would you be willing to speak in Parliament about the hardships they have caused?
- Would you vote for improved and enforceable rights for tenants, in social housing and private rented accommodation?
- Would you vote to ensure that immigration was restored to the scope of legal aid, so that there would be effective legal advice and representation for people with human rights claims, people seeking to appeal against deportation and people seeking to be (re)united with their families from abroad?
- Would you be willing to use your voice to ensure the funding of free and accessible legal advice and representation in your own constituency, whether through local or Greater Manchester services?

Please send any responses from your candidates by [email](#) or by post to GMLC, 159 Princess Road, Manchester M14 4RE

Greater Manchester Housing Providers Anti-Poverty Newsletter



Greater Manchester Housing Providers have been producing their quarterly newsletter for four years now. The idea stemmed from our willingness to work together and respond to the GM Poverty Commission recommendations by adopting our first set of [Anti-Poverty Pledges](#).

We quickly realised that there was such diversity in what each of us were doing to help tackle poverty in our communities that it would be a good idea to start to share that learning amongst ourselves in the hope that this would inspire others to stretch themselves to do more.

A good example of this is the Stockport Homes [Penny Lane Pantry](#) project, which was featured in one of our earliest issues. That project really caught people's attention; Stockport Homes have opened their fourth pantry now and there are at least ten others across GM with more in the pipeline. Another project that caught our eye was [Strictly Lunch](#), an Irwell Valley project that uses food as a way of reducing social isolation in older people, which links to the health agenda and has the potential for being scaled up across GM.

Sometimes it can be the smaller projects that take off. City West Housing shared a story about how their staff brought in unwanted winter coats which were made available via community buildings to anyone who needed one. Such a simple idea but so valuable and lots of us followed their example.



In our most recent [April issue](#) we shared our work to put housing at the top of the GM Mayor's agenda by supporting our call for 'everyone in Greater Manchester to live in a home they can afford'. We also included articles on two collaborative projects; Better Together, which is about forging closer working relationships between three of the housing providers in order to improve services for customers and save money, and our Athena Motiv8 project which is a GM wide programme aimed at supporting those who are furthest from employment back into work.

We'll be launching our updated Anti-Poverty Pledges next month and it includes an offer for any group or organisation who wants to work with us on any of our pledges to get in touch. You can use the contact form on our [website](#) or email [Julie Ralph](#)



Hidden: this is an excerpt from the executive summary. The full report is available [here](#)

A new report by GM Talent Match presents the findings from research undertaken to explore and understand 'hidden' young people (18-24, not in education, employment or training) across Greater Manchester. The aim of the research was to identify the profile of 'hidden' young people and discover why they do not seek or receive welfare support. It is estimated that there were almost 15,000

'hidden' young people in GM in March 2016.

Research suggests that experiencing unemployment at a young age can have a long-term, negative effect. These young people are more likely to spend longer out of work throughout their life; be paid less when in work (Macmillan, 2012); have poorer mental and physical well-being; and be involved in criminal activity (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010).

'Hidden' young people tend to fall into two groups; Type 1 are young people who have little certainty about their career interests and goals and, following disengagement with or withdrawal from Further Education they spend increased periods of time at home, unsure of their next steps. As a result of social isolation, they experience a number of issues, including mental health problems. Type 2 are young people living in a cultural environment which is thought to reinforce their perception that they will be unable to get meaningful employment. As a result of this, they often give up and instead turn to alternative, illegal means to financially support themselves.



There are a number of barriers which deter them from claiming welfare support and becoming 'known'. Mostly the barriers are around their actual, or (more often than not) their anticipated experience with Jobcentre Plus. This can relate to the difficulties in applying for and maintaining welfare support; the experience of customer service; or issues around sanctioning. Additional barriers can include access to alternative finance and the stigma associated with claiming welfare support

Early intervention recommendations: Targeted, additional provision to support all young people to achieve literacy and numeracy; intensive careers, education, information, advice and guidance targeted at the 'at risk' young people; improved tracking of young people and the inclusion of Jobcentre Plus in education.

If young people remain 'hidden' they are likely to be excluded from employment help and support, and this prevents Greater Manchester from understanding the full extent of youth unemployment. Additional research is needed to understand how to best engage with and support 'hidden' young people.



Shared Impact is a digital accelerator for charities offering free support.

They provide corporate mentorship, skills workshops, and investment for charities to enhance their digital capabilities. They are on the lookout for charities who may be interested, and they have grant funding so they can offer their support for free. To get in touch please [email](#)

Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 700 individuals from more than 200 organisations plus Local Authorities and MPs and an increasing number of members of the public.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page. You can also visit our YouTube channel [Community Voices](#)

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

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

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#)

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager: Chris Bagley
T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

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



Forthcoming Events:

Make do and Mend: Explore alternative forms of community-based provision

Thursday June 8th, 2017 from 9am - 4.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

To bring together third sector frontline organisations, community groups, academics and policymakers to discuss the third sector's role in tackling social inequalities and environmental challenges. [More information and book](#)

Human Development Report for Greater Manchester: invitation

On Wednesday June 14th, 2017 from 4—5.30pm at the GM Chamber of Commerce Building, Elliot House, 151 Deansgate, Manchester M3 3WD

Report Launch: This report is very timely, as GM appoints its first Mayor the report findings will contribute to current debates on how GM can develop a new, more inclusive and people-centred approach to policy making to address the very high level of deprivation. [More information and to book](#)

Wood Street Mission Queues, Clogs & Redemption Salford

Wednesday June 14th, 2017 5.30—7pm at Salford Museum & Art Gallery

The exhibition focuses on the charity's role sending tens of thousands of children to the seaside in the nineteenth century but what more can be done to promote inclusive growth at a time of growing inequality? [More Info & book](#)



'A Spanish Adventure' Booth Centre Theatre Company

On June 15th & 17th 7.30pm at

The Edge Theatre & Art Centre, Chorlton

[More information and to book tickets](#)

United Response's Supported Employment Working Lunch

June 16th, 2017 11am - 1 pm at Lancashire Cricket Club, Old Trafford, M16 0PX



GM Supported Employment Services is part of national disability charity, United Response. Through their job coaches, they support adults with disabilities and health conditions to find work, by assessing skills and abilities, matching them to relevant employers and then working with both to achieve reliable, motivated and committed employees. Please join them to find out about their work. [More Info & to book](#)

Any events you'd like GMPA to publicise? [Email us with the details](#)