

## Living Wage week 2021



Living Wage Week, November 15th - 21st, saw events every day of the week in Greater Manchester to celebrate the fight for a decent wage for all.

On Monday at the People's History Museum we learned the new rate for the Real Living Wage (RLW) of £9.90 per hour (outside London). This represents a pay rise for thousands of lower-paid workers in the city region. The event also heard Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham set out the plan to make Greater Manchester the first RLW City Region in the UK (more on that below), with the objective of every worker in Greater Manchester receiving at least the RLW by 2030. There were some great contributions from a wide range of speakers and in particular, a passionate plea to end low pay in the care sector from Danni Dolan, a care worker and Unison member.



Bury Council Leader Eamonn O'Brien with  
Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign  
Coordinator John Hacking

At the event Eamonn O'Brien, the Leader of Bury Council, was presented with a plaque to celebrate the local authority becoming a RLW employer. Bury is the fourth Council in Greater Manchester to take this important step, joining Manchester, Salford and Oldham.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday members of GMPA's team attended events organised by Salford CVS, pro.manchester and The Mustard Tree respectively. "There's an intrinsic connection between the happiness of employees and the productivity of a company" said Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership Chair Lou Cordwell at the pro.manchester event, "As employers, we have a massive responsibility to do the right thing." The room was full of business leaders, some who already pay the RLW and some who planned to, and were there to find out more.

On Thursday November 18th Greater Manchester Poverty Action hosted a policy roundtable event to mark Living Wage Week. The event was attended by a range of policy makers and opinion formers including businesses, VCSE representatives, academia, trade unions and the Living Wage Foundation. The discussion focused on how to build on the RLW work being done in Greater Manchester to tackle in-work poverty, with questions such as: *how ambitious can we be? what sectors should we be focussing on? and what else needs to happen in policy terms?*

One of the most important elements of the Week was the [launch of the Greater Manchester Living Wage City Region Action Plan](#), which we have been actively involved in shaping over the last year. Greater Manchester is the first city-region officially recognised by the Living Wage Foundation for its ambitious plans to increase take up of the RLW. The aim is to raise the number of accredited RLW Employers from 384 to 650 in three years, with all businesses paying the RLW by 2030.

This is a big step towards GMPA's objective to boost household incomes and financial resilience across Greater Manchester.

**John Hacking**

Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign Co-ordinator

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## **GMPA Vacancy: Head of Advocacy, Policy and Research**

35 hours per week, permanent post. £36,000 to £41,000 pro rata, depending on experience.

We are seeking a Head of Advocacy, Policy and Research to help drive forward our influencing work. We want Greater Manchester to be at the forefront of efforts to prevent and reduce poverty. In this new position, the successful applicant will play a central role in enabling that to happen.

What we are looking for: The successful applicant will have a minimum 2 years' experience in a relevant advocacy, policy and research role. They will have leadership experience and the ability to motivate a team and support GMPA to deliver against our strategic priorities. They will need a good grasp of policy relating to poverty and an understanding of the opportunities to address it locally. They will be able to plan and deliver on a range of policy and research outputs, in line with our three-year strategy, and be confident in undertaking direct advocacy with decision makers and stakeholders.

### **Further particulars, job description and person specification.**

Application deadline: 5pm on Thursday December 16th, 2021. Shortlisting for the role will be completed by December 21st, 2021, with interviews w/c January 10th, 2022.

## **In the Bleak Midwinter**

By Lisa Pollitt, Project Development Coordinator, National Energy Action

October became a month of despair for thousands of low income and vulnerable households. While energy suppliers announced increasing energy prices, households were also impacted as Universal Credit uplifts were withdrawn and the cost of living rose.



For those living in fuel poverty without sufficient energy for warmth and comfort this has had a detrimental impact on their quality of life. Additionally, households are having to make stark choices between heating or eating with children missing out on warm meals as well as struggling to provide hot water for bathing or laundry. Many households self-disconnect due to being unable to afford to top-up electricity or gas prepayment meters and cover the costs of both standing charges alongside their required energy use. This can result in cold, miserable homes blighted by condensation and damp with negative impacts on both physical and mental health.

NEA's [Warm and Safe Homes](#) advice line takes hundreds of energy and income maximization referrals each month and often clients highlight both worry and the despair they feel about living in fuel poverty.....

'I just want to feel normal, I would love to have a warm bath like other people do and just feel clean and normal'

'I don't have the money to top-up my meter'

'We sit in the cold as I am scared to use the heating as it costs so much'

The advice line helps individuals to better manage their energy use and be more energy efficient, deal with bills and fuel debt as well as access a range of help and support. It also offers clients access to income maximization and claim support assistance.

We would always urge anyone who is struggling to contact their supplier or other advice agencies to check their tariff and ensure they register for additional support such as the Warm Home Discount Scheme and the Priority Service Register. As last week marked Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week 2021 #COAW21 we also highlight research which indicates that the factors which cause or expose households to the risk of fuel poverty can impact on the heating and servicing behaviors of households to elevate CO risk in homes.

One of the new avenues of support this winter is the local authority Household Support Fund. It was recently introduced by the government to provide small payments to eligible households to meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and utilities. Individuals can check their eligibility by contacting their local council or by looking online for further information. Despite this welcome initiative it does not go far enough to support fuel poor and vulnerable households and additional interventions are needed now in order to prevent needless cold-related deaths and illness this winter. [National Energy Action](#) is calling on the UK Government to take more action to directly reduce energy prices and for Ofgem (the gas and electricity markets regulator) to do more to protect fuel poor and vulnerable households. National Energy Action believes that everyone deserves to live in a warm and safe home.

## Levelling up from the ground up

by Rose Grayston, a Senior Programme Manager at the New Economics Foundation



*The 'levelling up' agenda is frequently discussed by politicians, policy makers and public commentators, particularly in the context of economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.*

*But what does 'levelling up' actually mean? A report published by the New Economics Foundation argues that 'levelling up' must mean investment in both people and place, and the creation of initiatives that are guided by the needs of communities, with community ownership at the heart of regeneration.*

Depending on where you live in England, there can be huge differences in your quality of life. This is down to some areas' economic decline and low incomes, but also poor urban planning and underinvestment in social infrastructure. This government has made 'levelling up' deprived areas a central part of this mission, but we haven't yet seen any concrete plans for how they are going to do this.

The [final report of the No Place Left Behind Commission](#) into Prosperity and Placemaking has been launched. It's the culmination of more than a year of work, which the New Economics Foundation (NEF) contributed to, exploring the role of place – the built and natural environment – in this government's levelling up agenda, through the perspective of community-led projects to transform homes, high streets, parks and streets across the country.

At 270 pages, [the report](#) is packed with evidence and policy proposals on how to improve so-called 'left behind' neighbourhoods and enable local people to thrive. But in essence, the Commission's messages are simple:

- We don't have to choose between investing in people or in place. We need both to support the country's most deprived communities to recover from the pandemic, 11 years of austerity, and decades of economic and political neglect.
- Communities themselves must be at the heart of this government's levelling up plans. Only they know what makes their place special, what their community needs to make the most of itself, and how to reach the people and the places that get missed out by top-down regeneration schemes.
- [Community ownership](#) of buildings and spaces must be the glue that makes new levelling up investment stick. If the community owns its homes, shops, parks and other buildings, then local people will always have affordable and tailored places to live, work, create and gather.

For people to feel they belong, there must be something to belong to. For so many places around the country, the community doesn't have a college, a community centre, or a single public place where neighbours can come together to discuss shared challenges and organise shared solutions. But the report also shows the difference made to people's lives when basic social and community infrastructure is rebuilt from the ground up:

- [The Good Things Collective CIC](#) in Morecambe are working to transform an empty and neglected building in local authority ownership into a community hub, enabling and showcasing local people's businesses and creativity with bookable storage space, equipment, training rooms and workspaces.
- [Arches Local](#) in Chatham have used their Big Local funding to paint murals, plant trees, provide meals and activities to local children, and inspire the community around a new Neighbourhood Plan to guide development in the ways residents want to see.
- [Hastings Commons](#) have created an enclave of community-owned assets in the White Rock neighbourhood, demonstrating what can be done when homes, workspaces, parks and even caves are owned and managed in the community's interest.

The only way for the government to achieve its levelling up aims is for it to [transfer ownership of buildings and public spaces to community-led and owned bodies](#) on a mass scale. The report backs the campaign for a £2bn [Community Wealth Fund](#) and recommends new grant funding, powers for local authorities to pass on low-cost borrowing to community groups, powers for civic groups to purchase land and assets at fair values – plus a raft of other improvements across taxation, planning, transport, housing and more.

This breadth of political hues hasn't prevented the commission from recommending big, bold ideas: a one-off transfer of local government debt onto the national balance sheet, a £1.3bn fund to turn run-down homes for sale on the market into not-for-profit ownership, and a community right to buy registered assets of community value at an independently assessed fair value, to name a few. Read more from NEF [here](#).

## Unforeseen life events plunge over 15 million into financial insecurity



A new [report](#) from national poverty charity, [Turn2us](#), reveals how over 15 million people in the UK have experienced at least one life event in the past two years that has left them struggling to cope financially.

The research shows that women, disabled people, certain minoritised ethnic groups and young people, are the worst affected by the financial impact of life events, such as bereavement, illness, a relationship breakdown, or unemployment.

64% of women have experienced financial insecurity following a life event, compared to just over half of men (55%). In ethnic groups the figure was 76%, for disabled it was 72% and for young people aged between 25 to 34 75%. For people aged 55 and over the figure dropped to 46%.

The publication of the charity's report comes just weeks after the Covid-19 furlough scheme ended, and the £20 Universal Credit uplift was cut. Its findings show how life events can plunge people into financial insecurity, particularly those who are already struggling to make ends meet, and that there are barriers to people accessing the support they need.

Thomas Lawson, Turn2us Chief Executive commented: "In the absence of long-term solutions that prevent people being plunged into financial insecurity, we urge the government to mandate Local Welfare Assistance schemes, with an additional £250m of ringfenced funding each year. This will enable councils to step in and help prevent families from having to make difficult choices between putting food on the table and paying their bills, because of life events that are beyond their control."

Karen Isaacs, a Turn2us co-production partner with lived experience of financial insecurity, comments: "After a car crash left me unable to work, I had to quickly find ways to support myself financially. My initial claim for Universal Credit was not straightforward and caused a lot of stress at a time when I was under so much pressure from all sides. With no job and no money to support myself, while also being in a lot of pain, my mental health was absolutely at breaking point. I felt completely without any dignity, especially at my age – in my 60s - when I should have been receiving my pension.

"Now over three years later, I am still struggling and still trying to get a job. Recent cuts to Universal Credit have made matters worse and it is almost impossible to get help from anywhere for people in my position. This means yet another winter and Christmas struggling for money and worrying constantly."

The survey findings also suggest that shame and stigma are a barrier to seeking support. It also reveals the coping behaviours people use to get by: almost 50% of those surveyed relied on a credit card to cover day-to-day spending after the financial impact; 23% took out a payday loan; more than one third (36%) missed bills or debt repayments with 14% reporting missing repayments more than twice; and 9% had used a payday loan or another form of high-cost credit more than twice.

44% of the people who found it difficult or impossible to cover the costs of the life event did not seek support at all.

The life events research was undertaken by Turn2us to better understand the impact of life events on people's finances, how they cope, and what measures they need to support them. The survey and interviews explored a broad range of events that have an impact on people's finances in the areas of health, work, family, housing and legal circumstances. Read the full report [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.

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