

Benefit complexity and 'food bank diverts' leave many across the UK missing out on financial support, new data reveals



By Hollie Griss, Communications and Media Officer at Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA)

Our new study has revealed 'government red tape' and 'food bank diverts' have left people across the country facing financial hardship for nearly a decade.

In our survey of 2,700 UK residents, a worrying 60% believed financial support had felt 'limited for several years', with more than half (58%) reporting some financial struggles within the last six years.

These worrying findings highlight a problem greater, and much longer term, than UK households surviving the cost-of-living crisis. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed (22%) claimed to have felt the pressure on their finances in the last two to four years.

Looking at the results for Greater Manchester, 56% of those surveyed had applied for benefits or Universal Credit within the last decade. While some may have been successful (41%) in receiving financial support many remarked the process was tainted with 'diverts and delays'.

Nearly half those in Greater Manchester who had sought financial help said they were wrongly sent to a foodbank. This highlights the lack of knowledge about the range of support available for people at risk of or experiencing financial hardship, with agencies bypassing financial support and referring people directly to charitable food aid.

Across the UK as a whole, nearly one in five people had to seek support from the job centre, councils and help lines to get access to any cash benefits because the process was so 'unclear'.

And most concerningly, despite financial worries and hardship, **one in ten gave up on the process of finding financial support** because it was perceived to be too difficult or complicated. One respondent in the study described the process of seeking financial support in the UK as 'designed to make it impossible' and another said they were left 'confused', feeling 'helpless' and 'pushed to food banks'.

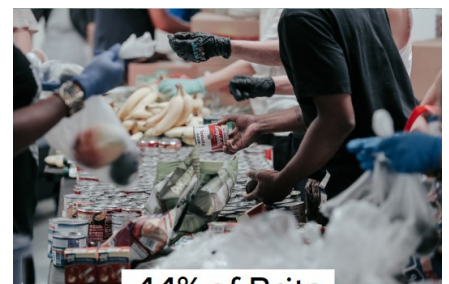
In partnership with local authorities and councils, we created the [Money Advice Referral Tool \(MART\)](#) to help people living in financial hardship identify the range of support available in their area, from benefits, universal credit to debt referrals. It helps support those who need 'cash first' help and reduces the reliance on foodbanks.

Graham Whitham, Chief Executive of GMPA, said: "We believe when tackling poverty and financial hardship in the UK we need to provide cash-first support to ensure we maximise household incomes. Food banks aren't the solution; they are a sticking plaster for the problem and ultimately shouldn't need to exist. Whilst the benefit system is often not generous enough, £19 billion of benefits go unclaimed nationwide each year – the Money Advice Referral Tool streamlines the process and helps people to get the support they are entitled to."

More than half of the 2,700 people surveyed by GMPA believed if they were faced with financial hardship there would be 'no support' for their situation. In a desperate bid to pay unexpected bills, the data showed **the same number of people would be as likely to seek help from a 'loan shark' as they would a 'financial adviser'**.

Graham Whitham added: "A common theme in the data is that people in financial hardship don't know where to turn. We are seeing a real impact on people's livelihood and wellbeing. More than one in 10 said they would feel 'ashamed' to be suffering from financial difficulties and 21% claimed they would struggle with the burden alone and try and sort it out for themselves. Unclear processes shouldn't be scuppering a person's quality of life."

[Click here to read our full press release.](#)



44% of Brits

who have sought financial help say they were wrongfully directed to food banks

Newly launched Poverty Research and Advocacy Network (PRAN) to advance the fight against poverty and injustice



By Dr Natalija Atas and Dr Vicki Dabrowski, Liverpool Hope University

A momentous gathering happened in Liverpool last month, uniting 160 people who represented over 87 different regional and national institutions, NGOs and charities.

Hosted by [Liverpool Hope University](#), the 'Cost-of-Living' conference brought together advocates working to eradicate the pressing issues of poverty and inequality.

Vital conversations about the causes and wide-reaching impacts of the cost-of-living crisis were held, shedding light on some shocking statistics. It was revealed that 34% of children (900,000) in the North of England were living in poverty during the pandemic and **150,000 children in the North West do not currently have their own bed** - instead, they are sleeping on hard flooring, sofas, air mattresses, or sharing with other family members.

In addition, [End Furniture Poverty](#) data showed that 230,000 people in the region live without a freezer, and 110,000 people are living without a washing machine.

While we, as the conference organisers, acknowledged that the cost-of-living crisis is only an acute symptom of long-standing issues of poverty and inequality, we also emphasised that it is a moment where more people than ever understand and can empathise with experiences of hardship and deprivation.



Therefore, we argued that the crisis presents a unique opportunity to mobilise and drive real change in tackling these issues, both regionally and nationally. There was a strong consensus in the room that the only way to achieve a more equal and empowered society is through collective action.

The Poverty Research and Advocacy Network (PRAN) was launched at the conference. **PRAN is an independent, collectively run advocacy network that will create a research and knowledge-sharing platform on the broad issue of social inequality.** Its advocacy work will focus on changing popular and stigmatising discourses on poverty that work to hinder social progress. It will be an interactive and dynamic platform, incorporating elements such as newsletters and a podcast series. These will be freely accessible to the public.

PRAN aims to bring together various stakeholders to amplify voices fighting against injustice, both regionally and nationally. Third-sector representatives, activists, politicians, civil servants, academics, researchers, lawmakers, journalists and members of the general public are encouraged to join the network. This wide representation is vital to the ethos of the network - established around the belief that **only collective, coordinated action can escalate the fight against poverty.**

Poverty should be understood as a structural issue created by the negligence of basic human needs and a series of poor political policies and choices. Poverty is a violation of basic human rights and a debilitating human experience. The fight against poverty is therefore possible through change - by working together to raise awareness and dismantle existing misconceptions about the experiences and causes of poverty. This is the top priority on the PRAN agenda.

For more information about how to join the network, please email info@pran.org.uk.

Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign Update



Living Wage Champion Awards

By Sophie Little, North West Programme Manager at the Living Wage Foundation

On Thursday 6 July, the Living Wage Champions Awards were held in Greater Manchester for the first time ever in recognition of the growth and strength of the movement in the region.

Greater Manchester has **693 Living Wage Employers** - meaning nearly 25,000 workers receiving a pay rise in line with the cost of living every year - and 18 Living Hours Employers, **more than anywhere else in the UK.**

In 2021, it became the first city-region in the UK to be recognised for its plan to bring employers together from the public and private sectors and civil society to create a Living Wage city-region where the real Living Wage is the norm. The awards were hosted by BBC North West presenter Annabel Tiffin and Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham delivered an opening speech. Of the 22 winners nationally, four were from Greater Manchester:

- **Advocate of the Year Award:** Chris Smallwood, [Anchor Removals](#)
- **Beyond the Living Wage Award:** [One+All](#)
- **Campaign of the Year Award:** Greater Manchester Campaign calling on Anchor Hanover to Accredite
- **Third Sector Champion:** [Salford CVS.](#)

GMPA sponsored the Living Wage Places award category which was won by Royal Docks and the award was presented by GMPA Chief Executive, Graham Whitham.

It was a great night, and we are grateful to the support we received from GMPA as an award sponsor, and also for the support and collaboration we receive all year round from the GMLWC.



Good Employment Week

By John Hacking, Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign (GMLWC) Coordinator at GMPA

In recent years GMPA has worked alongside colleagues in the GM Growth Company to promote and develop the GM Good Employment Charter which has as one of its key elements the need for Charter members to pay the Living Wage. This year saw the first GM Good Employment Week, which ran from 19th to 23rd June.

During that week, we hosted an event jointly with [Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations \(GMCVO\)](#). The event was a session for the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. It was a great opportunity to celebrate and promote good employment in the VCSE sector.

The event saw over 40 attendees and heard the first-hand experiences of Big Life Company, GM Moving and Mustard Tree in accrediting to the Living Wage Foundation and their involvement in the [Good Employment Charter](#). Ian MacArthur from the Good Employment Charter team outlined the benefits of the Charter and how VCSE organisations could get involved. It also provided a networking opportunity for VCSE organisations to learn from each other and to access resources and support.

In other news, we have now exceeded the target set in the GM Living Wage Action Plan of 650 accredited employers by November 2023. A new target will be set and work will continue to grow the number of Living Wage Employers in the GM City Region. For more information, [visit the GMLWC webpage.](#)

New figures show two-child limit impacts nearly 90,000 Greater Manchester children



Based on new data launched by the End Child Poverty Coalition

The End Child Poverty Coalition has produced figures on the number of children who are impacted by the two-child limit to benefit payments across the UK.

The new figures were published on Monday 10 July, a day before MPs called for the 'ineffective and cruel' two-child cap to be abolished in a debate led by the MP for Liverpool Riverside, Kim Johnson.

Research by the End Child Poverty coalition has found that, by 2022, **89,270 babies and children across Greater Manchester were directly impacted** by the policy which means that – since its introduction in April 2017 – almost all families having a third or subsequent child are no longer entitled to receive support for those children through Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit.

1.5 MILLION CHILDREN are now affected by the two-child limit.



And the new analysis of data has found that the Greater Manchester Parliamentary constituencies worst impacted by the two-child limit include **Blackley and Broughton** (where **more than one in four** of all children are hit by the policy), Bolton South East, Manchester Central, Manchester Gorton, Oldham West and Royton, Rochdale, and Oldham East and Saddleworth.

Recent research has shown that abolishing the two-child limit would be the most cost-effective way of reducing child poverty. If implemented, this would **immediately lift 250,000 children out of poverty** across the country – and a further 850,000 children would be raised out of deep poverty, at a cost of just £1.3 billion.

The Government's original – and continued – rationale for the policy is that parents who receive support from the social security system should make the 'same financial choices' about having children as those supporting themselves solely through work. However, the majority of families caught by the two-child limit across the country – 58% – are in work, with the policy creating a hole in their budgets that simply cannot be plugged by working additional hours.

Many others will have their children at a time when they are able to support themselves solely through work, but may need to turn to the social security system at some point in the future – for example, as a result of redundancy, bereavement, ill health or the breakdown of a relationship.

Joseph Howes, Chair of the End Child Poverty Coalition and CEO of Buttle UK said:

"The benefits system should be there to help us all. Any family could fall on hard times - from losing a partner, being unable to obtain secure properly paid employment, or not being able to keep up with the increase in the cost of living. Poorer families who rely on benefit payments are denied the money they need for their children as payments are capped at the second child."

Kim Johnson, MP for Liverpool Riverside said:

"The two-child cap on benefits payments is as cruel as it is ineffective. Larger families are punished, leaving them struggling. Lifting the cap would immediately lift a quarter of a million children out of poverty – making it the single most effective intervention to tackle child poverty."

Graham Whitham, End Child Poverty Coalition spokesperson and CEO of GMPA said:

"The two-child limit on benefits is one of the most pernicious welfare policies ever seen in this country - it's time for it to be scrapped. It forces parents into horrible choices and denies families the support they need from our social security system.

"This new data serves to show the extremely damaging effect this policy is having in Greater Manchester and across the country. The **government must lift the two-child limit** so that all children can thrive."

[Learn more about the End Child Poverty Coalition's campaign to end the two-child limit, #AllKidsCount.](#)

Amplifying the voices of lived experience



By Daniel Oliver, Head of Programmes at GMPA

One of GMPA's strategic aims is to embed the voices of people with lived experience in the decision-making structures of Greater Manchester.

We know that people who are living in poverty, or who have lived in poverty, bring unique experiences and expertise to designing anti-poverty solutions. As an organisation we have actively encouraged the role of lived experience in decision-making, including by running the [Tameside Poverty Truth Commission](#) and [recommending that anti-poverty strategies are created in partnership](#) with communities affected by poverty.

In 2021 we brought together a temporary Poverty Reference Group, composed of local people with lived experience of poverty, to inform the [Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission](#). This group recommended that “a new Panel should be established for people with lived experience of poverty, to complement the existing panels based on communities of identity.”

We are pleased to announce that **a new Poverty Reference Group (PRG) will be established** by GMPA later this year, with a view to this group becoming a **permanent part of the Greater Manchester infrastructure**. The PRG will bring together people from across different communities and demographics of Greater Manchester on a regular basis, **to inform and influence policy and practice** across the city region. The group will build positive relationships with key stakeholders across all sectors to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of poverty are heard across relevant organisations, forums and networks.

This is an exciting step in amplifying the voices of lived experience of poverty in our city region, and we are looking forward to supporting the PRG to encourage positive change. To learn more about our plans, [get in touch](#).



Policy and research updates

We are providing a summary of the latest news and policy developments to keep you up to date with what is happening across the UK.

New research by CMC markets analysed Google search trends at a local level to understand **areas most worried about financial concerns**. Ranking sixth, Wigan residents exhibit an active search rate of 4,049 monthly searches per 100K individuals, with a strong emphasis on finding help to cover their bills. [Read more.](#)

A new report by the Resolution Foundation warns poor economic growth, and a failure to fairly distribute wealth, could see **poorer household incomes rise by only 2% over the next decade**, compared to 12% for typical households and 14% for those in the top income quintile. [Read more.](#)

Mintago's latest research of 1,333 full-time and part-time UK workers has found that **62% of Britons say that the rising cost of living is their greatest source of stress**. [Read more.](#)

Of the 1,000 employees surveyed by Ciphre across the UK, three in four (76%) said they have felt stressed or overwhelmed at times because of increases to their cost of living, **nearly a third (31%) have asked their employer for a pay rise**, and over a third (34%) have been actively looking for a better paying job. [Read more.](#)

Further education students in England are struggling in “extreme poverty”, forced to work excessive hours in insecure jobs and falling behind with their studies as a result, according to a new APPG report. [Read more.](#)

The **number of disadvantaged two-year-olds registered for 15-hour childcare is now the lowest ever**, according to the latest official statistics, while the number of children of working parents registered for the 30-hour entitlement is at its highest. [Read more.](#)

Household finances will be corroded by rising living costs and elevated rates until at least May 2024, according to calculations by consultancy Retail Economics and accountancy firm Grant Thornton. [Read more.](#)

A new IFS report explores how material living standards have changed since the beginning of the pandemic, based on household incomes as well as other indicators. One key finding is that **individuals aged 50–70 who moved from employment into economic inactivity in 2020–21 were more likely to end up in poverty** (in the year of exit) than those who became inactive in previous years. [Read more.](#)

We are delighted to welcome two new members to the GMPA team!



Thomas Waring, Business Development Executive

Thomas is responsible for developing and supporting the delivery of our consultancy offer and training and events programme, including our conferences.

Thomas cares deeply about how we make actual lasting, positive change to people's lives, and how we can tackle poverty and inequalities in a strategic way.

He has extensive experience in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE). His previous role was at Macc, supporting the VCSE to change how local economies work, in order to build a fairer economy in the city of Manchester. Previous roles also include outreach for rough sleepers and support for male survivors of sexual violence.

Outside of work, Tom has held a number of trustee positions, and is currently on the board of Step Up MCR. He is also a lover of food, and has a particular obsession with Italian food and Italy in general, he is (slowly) learning the language and travels there with his wife whenever they can.



Aleksandr Mednikov, Research Assistant

Aleksandr undergoes his summer placement at GMPA as a Research Assistant while pursuing his Undergraduate degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics.

He has a particular interest in projects and economic policies aimed at poverty reduction with a long-term impact on affected communities. Over the summer, he will help us with the evaluation of the Money Matters project and fundraising for GMPA. Outside of his work, Aleksandr enjoys volunteering, bouldering, skiing and conquering mountains.



Upcoming events



Citizens Advice July Cost of Living Briefing

Monday 24 July, 1:30pm-2:30pm

Join Citizens Advice for their July cost-of-living event where they'll be analysing the increasing impact of the crisis on mortgage holders and private renters. [Learn more and register to attend.](#)

just fair

The Socio-Economic Duty in Action: Case studies

Tuesday 25 July, 6pm-7pm



The socio-economic duty (SED) is an under-utilised tool available to statutory bodies, which can support efforts to tackle socio-economic deprivation. This webinar will highlight the need for positive examples of the SED in practice and reflect on what can be learnt from these examples. [Learn more and register to attend.](#)

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](#).

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.