

A Call to Care

Learning from the *Caring Working Living* Project in Greater Manchester

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Summary

Existing research on carers and the labour market reveals there is a problem of informal, unpaid carers leaving work or unable to juggle work and care, estimated to cost billions to the taxpayer and businesses. Enabling individuals with caring responsibilities to enter and stay in the workforce is of moral and economic importance.

The Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation's (GMCVO) *Caring Working Living* (CWL) project was a short practical project to understand and address this problem. This exploratory research report evaluates its impact and summarises the learning within the context of the employment strategies of the Greater Manchester (GM) city-region.

Through a literature review and expert interviews this report aims to contextualise CWL in city-regional policy priorities, define its strategic importance and consider how to maximise impact through policy levers available in GM.

Key findings:

- GM currently lacks a comprehensive strategy for improving the position of informal, unpaid carers in the labour market.
- There is promising context for this to be developed within GM's vision for more inclusive and quality employment.
- Whilst there are limited formal governance powers in GM, there is some scope to influence through regional mechanisms and priorities.
- GM policy makers must identify and explicitly name those with caring responsibilities in strategy priorities. Available data shows 12.5% of the working-age population in GM self-define as carers, as well as many more 'hidden carers'.
- The pandemic has increased the take up of remote working, whilst also highlighting the importance of unpaid care.
- Learning from informal carers and mainstreaming their need for different types of flexible work would help policy makers in GM to develop quality work for the wider population.

This report begins with an introduction to the CWL project, its aims, method, findings and outputs, before summarising existing research on informal carers and the labour market.

Chapter 1 sets the context for city-regional employment priorities on reducing labour market inequalities and improving job quality in all sectors, showing that GM had been setting a vision on more inclusive and quality employment. It reveals a blind spot on informal carers and the labour market in current GM priorities.

Chapter 2 analyses the importance of CWL in this blind spot, revealing that 12.5% of the working-age population in GM self-define as carers, a greater proportion of which are women. Findings show that more flexible opportunities and more inclusive recruitment are required to meet the needs of informal carers and by extension those with caring responsibilities.

Chapter 3 shows the soft policy mechanisms currently being used in GM to shape good quality work: convening, network-building, educating, and innovating. But there are opportunities to further maximise impact through additional policy levers.

The pandemic has increased the take up of remote working whilst also highlighting the importance of unpaid care. Policy makers must learn from the needs of informal carers so that different types of flexible work and inclusive recruitment practices can be mainstreamed to develop better quality work for all.

Introduction

The *Caring Working Living* project

Caring Working Living: Aims

The mission of GMCVO's CWL project was to improve employment opportunities for people with caring responsibilities in GM, by bringing together employers with carers and/or parents out of work, to understand the barriers to employment and explore ways to overcome them. The practical aim of the project was to support returners into employment and educate employers on their needs. More broadly, GMCVO wanted to understand the needs and experiences of this cohort to consider what can be done to ensure that everyone can access quality employment and reach their potential.

As a centre for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in GM, GMCVO has been closely involved in the development of the GM *Good Employment Charter*, as well as the design and delivery of GM skills and employment strategies. As the lead body for the programmes *Talent Match*¹ and *Hidden Talent*², GMCVO have been raising awareness on marginalisation and exclusion from the labour market in GM and how to improve participation. Through developing relationships with employers and employment support organisations, GMCVO recognised that people who have, or have had, caring responsibilities, often face difficulties in participating in the labour market. **It is expected that findings from the CWL project will contribute to further policy developments, raise awareness of the value of carers in the workforce, and encourage specific initiatives to remove barriers to participation.**

The CWL project was led by GMCVO, and delivered with support from the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. This was a pilot project, funded by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) from June 2019 to May 2020, as part of the grant funding to support people back into work after time out for caring (GEO, 2018c).

Caring Working Living: Method

The project recruited a cohort of 85 'returners', people who had taken at least 12 months out of work due to caring responsibilities and were looking to return. The project also engaged a cohort of 56 employers committed to offering suitable employment opportunities for returners, and worked with 23 employment support organisations across GM.

Demographics of returners who engaged with the programme:

- The average age of returners in the CWL programme was 43, the youngest being 26 years of age and the oldest 68.
- The majority of CWL returners were female (80% of those who reported), many educated to degree level (50% of those who reported).³
- Over half of CWL returners identified themselves as being 'sandwich carers': having both parental responsibilities for young children as well as caring responsibilities for an adult.

Returners engaged in coaching, work visits and employability support with employers. The consultation service, *Breaking Down Barriers*, was set up offering insight for employers from the returners on inclusive recruitment practices.

¹ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/talent-match>

² <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/GMsHiddenTalent>

³ Data reported to GMCVO from optional questions gathered during the referral stage of the CWL project.

Caring Working Living: Findings

- CWL returners were motivated to return to the workforce in order to: increase household income, change daily life and routine, build or develop personal identities, be a positive role model to children, feel useful to the community, and leave the house.
- Some barriers for returners re-entering the labour market were described as: difficulties accessing work experience, employer assumptions about carers, low confidence, lack of qualifications or skills, a lack of flexibility in working hours.
- Existing support programmes were not available or accessible to all: returners in their 40s reported being unable to access Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) services aimed at older groups, while other returners were looking for practical experience and skills such as workplace visits, work trials and work experience.
- Employers were often not aware of the benefits of recruiting returners: increasing diversity, accessing high-calibre talent, and improving retention rates.

Conclusions from CWL:

- In GM, there are people with caring responsibilities looking to re-enter the workforce but they face barriers to returning. More inclusive recruitment practices and opportunities for flexible working are needed.
- Returners need support to build confidence, manage personal needs, and access flexible employment. Existing support is not always known or accessible to this group.
- Employers need support to better understand the value that workforce diversity and flexible working practices bring, and how to attract skilled and experienced returners to their organisation.

Caring Working Living: Outputs

A **three-part toolkit for employers** on recruiting and retaining employees requiring flexible working arrangements.⁴

Part One: What is Flexible Working – covers the ten types of flexible working, the benefits and challenges for each type, guidance on how to introduce flexible working practices, and actions for employers looking to improve their flexible working policies and practices.

Part Two: How to Ensure Interview Practices Support Returners – presents a best-practice checklist for inclusive recruitment and practical guidance for interview processes, focusing on tackling unconscious bias.

Part Three: How to Attract Returners to Your Organisation – offers actions to employers on how to attract carers to an organisation and encourage applications from carers.

The **Support Agency Directory** (accurate as of April 2020, now archived), providing a database of local organisations offering support for returners. Topics include: welfare, finance, housing, wellbeing and mental health, caring, and employment.

A **report on accessible recruitment pathways**; particularly the role of job listing boards in promoting flexible working (Drew, 2020).

⁴ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/caringworkingliving/employers#Toolkit>

In the Spring Budget 2017, national government signalled a commitment to supporting more parents and carers to return to work in the private and public sector (GEO, 2017). The GEO (2018b) launched a Returners Fund Programme, from which the funding for CWL was granted.

We know that working carers and people with caring responsibilities who are looking for work, face structural barriers. The known reasons preventing individuals balancing caring responsibilities and employment include:

- A lack of suitable flexible employment opportunities;
- A lack of suitable and affordable care;
- Attitudes and discrimination from employers in the recruitment process;
- An existing culture of presenteeism in organisations.

The existing research also shows that individuals looking to return to work report lacking confidence, experience and up-to-date skills (Kendall, 2018; Carers UK, 2019). These are well documented in *Supporting carers back into work* by the Centre for Ageing Better (2020).

There are various existing resources sharing recommendations to overcome these barriers, often directed at employers: *Returners: A Toolkit for Employers* (GEO, 2018a); *Returner Programmes: Best Practice Guidance for Employers* (GEO, 2018b); *Juggling Work and Unpaid Care* (Carers UK, 2019); and Greater Manchester Combined Authority's (GMCA) *Working Carer Toolkit* (2018).

Summary of recommendations made to employers:

- Advertising and supporting flexible working;
- Creating a culture of support;
- Helping managers to facilitate the needs of their team;
- Making use of technology to work more remotely;
- Building opportunities for progression;
- Offering additional care leave.

Recommendations to government include:

- Supporting the expansion of flexible working;
- Improving employment law and practice;
- Investing in quality, affordable care.

Recognising the barriers to juggling working and caring, and taking on recommendations for change is of broad economic and political importance for government and employers because:

- This problem affects a large number of people: at least 12.5% of the working-age population in GM (see Chapter 2);
- Many informal carers are giving up their job: 2.6 million nationally (Carers UK, 2019), and 24% are considering it (Austin and Heyes, 2020);
- Many want to work for a sense of identity and satisfaction as well as for financial reasons (GEO, 2018b).

Enabling individuals with caring responsibilities to enter and stay in the workforce benefits the wider economy and business' bottom line. It is estimated that unpaid carers leaving employment cost the public purse £2.9 billion a year in welfare payments and lost tax revenue (LSE, 2018). With many out of work and wanting to work, informal carers are recognised as “an untapped resource for the economy” (House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2018; p.6). It has also been estimated that UK companies could save over £8 billion by adopting flexible working policies to support those with caring responsibilities; saving up to £4.8 billion a year in unplanned absences and a further £3.4 billion in improved employee retention (Carers UK, 2019).

Further implications have been associated with improving employment support for people with caring responsibilities. These include tackling the gender pay gap and supporting an ageing population. In their inquiry into the gender pay gap, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee stated that “old-fashioned approaches to flexibility in the workplace and a lack of support for those wishing to re-enter the labour market are also stopping employers from making the most of women’s talent and experience” (2016; p.5). Furthermore, with an ageing population, demand for unpaid informal care is predicted to grow, “with an expectation that the demand for care provided by spouses and adult children will more than double over the next thirty years” (ONS, 2013), meaning more people will be juggling working and caring responsibilities and signalling that the labour market must adapt to become more inclusive to their needs.

Measuring these changes allows us to identify when problems arise. While standard economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) often exclude unpaid care work, treating it as unproductive, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) encourages metrics that capture unpaid care work in labour force surveys internationally. The ILO highlights the link between high levels of unpaid work and low levels of labour market participation, claiming “unpaid care work [is] the main barrier to women’s labour [market] participation” (ILO, 2018; p.72). The ILO has estimated the value of unpaid care work in the UK represents 22% of GDP (including caregiving in the household or another household, as well as housework). **Unpaid caring labour is essential to sustaining day-to-day life, it is mostly done by women and at present is unrecognised and undervalued by policy makers.**

A Call to Care: Method

This exploratory research took two phases. The first phase was a literature review of published policies and an online search for policy in development (such as webinars on the *Build Back Better* campaign), to map the landscape of employment priorities in GM. Understanding the policy landscape is vital for maximising the impact of the CWL project.

The second phase consisted of interviews with policy experts in GM, representing: The GMCA, The Growth Company, The *Good Employment Charter*, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and GMCVO. Interviews covered: employment strategy in the city-region and within the organisations; priority groups for employment support and where informal carers and parents sit; ways to make employment more inclusive in the city-region; and the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. These discussions on the priorities and developments in policy thinking allow us to consider the future impact of the CWL project in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

This project set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the current landscape for policies and strategies on inclusive and flexible employment in the Greater Manchester city-region?
2. What is the strategic importance of the GMCVO's CWL project within the strategies for inclusive and flexible employment in Greater Manchester?
3. How might GMCVO maximise their impact within these strategies in the future?

Definitions

Carers and people with caring responsibilities

The CWL project recruited 'returners': defined as parents and/or carers who had had a break from paid employment for at least 12 months due to their unpaid, caring responsibilities and were looking to re-enter the workforce. This group could include informal carers looking after a relative or friend who is ill, elderly or disabled and may be in a different household, as well as, parents looking after children full time. As mentioned above, the majority of returners joining CWL were sandwich carers, with informal caring responsibilities for an adult relative or friend as well as parental responsibilities.

This report will reflect on the wider implications of the CWL project in the GM policy landscape. It will consider what can be learned from the returner group to support carers and parents to participate in an inclusive labour market. This report uses a broader definition of 'individuals with caring responsibilities' to include informal carers, sandwich carers and parents.

This project sits within a body of research on 'unpaid carers', who are often referred to as 'informal carers'. It is important to note that informal carers are a notoriously difficult group to capture and that definitions of carers, caring labour and caring responsibilities can vary, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. The time commitments of carers can vary widely from a few hours a week to around-the-clock care. Roles and responsibilities may include: help getting out of bed or washing and dressing, preparing meals, getting out of the house, shopping, picking up medication, travelling to appointments and many others.

The Department of Health and Social Care's standard definition of informal unpaid carers is: "people who look after family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental ill health or disability, or care needs related to old age. This does not include any activities as part of paid employment" (p.4, Powell et al., 2020). Some carers receive Carers Allowance from the Government: an allowance of £67.25 a week to individuals who spend at least 35 hours a week caring for a disabled person who receives certain

benefits. Informal carers in paid work must be earning less than £128 a week. This report focuses on informal, unpaid carers and does not cover carers who are employed in the care sector (e.g. working in residential or nursing care, or domiciliary care).

Flexible work

Flexible working denotes variations on a ‘traditional’ Fordist working schedule. Flexibilities come in the form of where, when and how long people work for. The better-known forms of flexible working are part-time work or working from home. Definitions of flexible work vary:

Forms of flexible working	As defined by...		
	CWL ⁵	CIPD ⁶	Government ⁷
Part-time working	•	•	•
Term-time working	•	•	
Job-sharing	•	•	•
Flexitime	•	•	•
Compressed hours	•	•	•
Annual hours	•	•	•
Working from home	•	•	•
Mobile / teleworking	•	•	
Four-day week	•		
Commissioned outcomes	•	•	
Career breaks		•	
Phased retirement			•
Staggered hours			•
Zero-hours contracts		•	

This report applies the CWL’s conceptualisation of flexible work, encompassing ten types of flexible working solutions that can make employment accessible to people with various caring responsibilities.

⁵ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/news-attachments/A4-visual-toolkit.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working/types-of-flexible-working>

Chapter 1: Policy landscape

Key points

- GM lacks a comprehensive strategy for improving the position of informal carers in the labour market, but there is promising context for this to develop.
- Whilst there are limited formal powers in GM, there is some scope to influence employment policies and resources. Before the pandemic, GM had been setting a vision on more inclusive and quality employment.
- Certain types of flexible working practices have been quickly implemented during the pandemic, and now further flexibilities need to be encouraged on the terms of employees. It is promising to see a clear commitment from policy makers to learning from the experience of the coronavirus outbreak.

1.1 Employment priorities in GM

The strategic mission for GM is currently set out in the GMCA's strategy *Our People, Our Place* (2017a), which aims for the region to be "one of the best places in the world to grow up, get on and grow old" (p.4). Within the ten priorities needed to get there, priority number three is given to growing "good jobs, with opportunities for people to progress and develop" (p.28). There have since been significant recent developments in the city-region's economic and employment policy landscape, with the publication of the *Local Industrial Strategy* (LIS; GMCA et al., 2019), the creation of the *Good Employment Charter* (2019) and with the coronavirus outbreak the campaign to *Build Back Better* (announced 2020).

Led by the national government initiative to boost productivity and earning power through an Industrial Strategy white paper, the GMCA agreed to work with the May Government to develop one of the first Local Industrial strategies (GMCA, 2017b). The *GM Independent Prosperity Review* underpinned this strategy by identifying core barriers to overcome in order to improve economic performance, including: population health, education and skills, infrastructure, innovation, and leadership and management (Coyle et al, 2019). The LIS mentions an aim to build "a skills and work system that ensures everyone reaches their potential" (p.10) and signals the importance of a "new Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter... to improve productivity, wages and job quality in all sectors" (p.22).

The *Good Employment Charter* was developed through consultation with employers, unions and employment specialists, including GMCVO and the GM Chamber of Commerce. It aims to support all employers in the city-region to identify how they can strive for and implement the principles of quality employment: secure work, flexible work, a real living wage, workplace engagement, recruitment practice and progression, people management, and a productive and healthy workplace. Charter supporters commit to improving on these principles, and the Charter members must meet set criteria for each principle.⁸ The Charter also aims to guide employers to key information and operate as "a movement that is constantly evolving so that employers never rest on their laurels" (interviewee account). The development of this Charter demonstrates the concerns over the quality of employment practices in the city-region, and signals a clear policy commitment to encouraging good work across the conurbation.

⁸ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

Other policy documents currently driving employment priorities in GM include:

- The *GM Skills and Employment Framework* – currently under development by the Learning and Work Institute and the GM Employment and Skills Advisory Panel. At the time of writing, this is yet to be published, but active discussions with government departments are taking place about its implementation.
- *Build Back Better* – the city-region’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. Supported by the GM Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and currently in development. This is discussed in the next section (1.2).

Currently, within GM’s core strategies for quality work, there is no explicit mention of the need to improve the position of those with caring responsibilities in the labour market. In the Charter the needs of specific groups are not discussed, but there is a mention of flexible working offered as a way of “providing greater equality of opportunity, creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace” (see website). In the GM LIS there is no mention of informal carers, parents or flexible working, and support for workers is framed as “supporting businesses to improve their leadership and management capacity, as well as their efficiency and effectiveness” (p.80).

There are a couple of separate documents in GM aimed at influencing employers to support informal carers already in work: The Carers Charter (2018) and the Working Carer Toolkit (2019). This signals **recognition of the need to make employment in the city-region more inclusive for people with caring responsibilities** and illustrates the difficulties in juggling caring with working by offering advice to employers on how to support staff. However, this thinking is yet to translate into GM’s core policy priorities.

Whilst there is no attempt to link informal carers to the labour market in these core policy documents, policy experts in interviews recognised a shift in political will towards reducing labour market inequalities in general, and towards fostering stronger intentions to improve the quality and flexibility of work for all citizens in GM. The position of informal carers in the labour market is not currently a written priority in GM, but there is a promising policy context for this to develop.

It is also worth mentioning that at national-level the government has been considering ways to develop more flexible working practices. Under the May Government, the National Industrial Strategy clearly stated its aim: “to help realise the potential in the labour market, including amongst women, older workers, carers and disabled people, we will work with business to make flexible working a reality for all” (2017; p.54). Furthermore, Johnson’s Government indicated pre-coronavirus that “measures will be brought forward to encourage flexible working” (UK Parliament, 2019; p.8) and in March 2020 stated, “we committed in our Manifesto to make flexible working the default. Subject to consultation, we will bring forward these new measures in our Employment Bill” (UK Parliament, 2020). Since March the Government has been prioritising employment policy to tackle the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak. It remains to be seen whether flexible working will continue to be a government priority, and how varied the forms of flexibility will be.

1.2 The impact of the coronavirus outbreak

When the UK was put into “lockdown” by the Prime Minister on 23rd March 2020, the country was restricted to staying home. All employees who were not key workers were forced to work remotely or were furloughed, and self-employed people who lost work were able to apply for income replacement support. However, many workers have been excluded from support schemes (estimated to be 3 million tax payers according to the Excluded UK campaign group), and the DWP recorded a doubling of Universal Credit claims: 2.9 million new claims made between 16th March and 26th May (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2020).

Conditions under lockdown represented a clear cut from the norm. Individuals, businesses and policy makers have since been fighting to mitigate the negative impacts on lives and livelihoods. Within these difficult circumstances, we consider what opportunities for learning there may be.

As economic activity slowed dramatically during lockdown, the economy saw a recession described as “unprecedented in modern times”, with GDP dropping 26% between February and April 2020 (Harari et al., 2020; p.3). The Bank of England announced emergency measures, cutting interest rates and expanding quantitative easing. The Government’s response package included the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, four different business loans schemes and a package of measures in the Plan for Jobs (See Harari et al.; p.28–33), with the broad aim to keep businesses afloat and keep people employed. There is great concern over the extent to which the rate of unemployment will rise when the furlough scheme is discontinued. We have already seen a surge in redundancies between June and September 2020, where the number of redundancies has now reached the same level (314,000) as the peak of the financial crisis in 2009 (311,000) (ONS, 2020a).

Steps have also been taken to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in GM: the Business Growth Hub offered the #HereforBusiness advice services for local businesses, a specialist jobs board *Employ GM* was launched to connect and advise individuals and employers impacted by the pandemic, and Mayor Andy Burnham gathered information on companies who continued to operate without following the lockdown rules before writing to 150 firms to raise concerns (Williams, 2020).

Impact of the pandemic on unpaid caring labour

The impact of the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown on unpaid caring labour has been dramatic. Research during the lockdown has estimated “an additional 4.5 million unpaid carers in the UK since the coronavirus outbreak” and “2.8 million more workers are juggling work and unpaid care” (Carers Week, 2020; p.4). In addition, given that schools closed to children whose parents were not ‘key workers’, many parents have had to take on extra responsibilities as full-time care-givers and teachers – in addition to their employment. Research indicates that mothers have shouldered more of this labour (IFS, 2020). Furthermore, a large majority (70%) of those providing informal care before the pandemic have had to increase the number of hours spent caring, averaging an additional 10 hours per week. This was the result of reduced carer service provision, and a shortage of resource from care professionals who were isolating or without personal protective equipment (Carers UK, 2020).

Lockdown has not been experienced equally by all, with women bearing the larger portion of caring responsibilities. There have been concerns raised about regression on the gender equality agenda; not just in the UK, but worldwide (Power, 2020). In two-parent, heterosexual families in the UK, women have been more likely to be on reduced hours, have left or lost work, and are more likely to have been furloughed. Furthermore, the lockdown has impacted sectors differently, with higher paid workers more likely to be able to work from home; especially when digital communication is integrated into the workplace and the job does not require physical activity (ONS, 2020b). Female-dominated industries such as hospitality, retail and tourism have been particularly badly affected by the lockdown, as their medium-to-long term success depends on the ability to accommodate safe social distances.

The pandemic, lockdown and economic downturn raise additional issues for people with caring responsibilities seeking work or trying to stay in work. These include: the increased time caring putting additional pressure on juggling work and care; greater vulnerability to job loss if care and work responsibilities are no longer compatible; difficulty negotiating flexible work needs

with the right to request available after working 26 weeks; and an increase in unemployment with higher demand for jobs pushing those who are further from the labour market further still. **Looking ahead, as the country emerges from lockdown measures and government schemes are withdrawn, the true economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak will become visible. Decision makers must recognise the impact on informal carers and parents to prevent further hardship for those excluded from the labour market, and their families.**

Shifting thinking in a pandemic: A new normal

The coronavirus pandemic has shifted the economic and policy landscape, with policy makers feeling that we cannot go back to what we were doing before. The direct policy responses to the impact of the pandemic in the city-region are: recovery plans by each Local Authority, and the *Build Back Better* campaign from the GMCA and LEP. These were being consulted on and drawn up at the time of writing. *Build Back Better* aims to engage businesses in a standards-led approach to re-opening the economy after the coronavirus lockdown, gathering evidence from businesses on what it would mean for them to build back better. Policy experts interviewed who were also involved in the process of recovery planning at local- and GM-level reported a **renewed focus on quality work and the principles of the *Good Employment Charter* to manage the spread of the virus and support strong economic recovery.**

Policy experts interviewed reported that the sudden break from the norm has offered space to pause and reflect on what should happen next. Almost all interviewees recognised we “can’t go back” to normal, meaning life as it was before the pandemic happened. This aligns with findings from the Royal Society of Arts (2020) in April, which showed that just 9% of the public wanted a total return to ‘normal’ after the lockdown. For one expert interviewee this sentiment materialised as: “we cannot allow them [employers] to go forward in the same way: on zero hours contracts, low pay, it just isn’t sustainable and leaves us very vulnerable to another health crisis”. Publically, there is recognition that quality employment protects the population’s health; particularly as we saw Leicester going into the first local lockdown in response to a spike in cases, which was partly due to unsafe working conditions in the garment-manufacturing sector. As one interviewee succinctly put it, “good employment is now becoming a public health issue”.

Impact of the pandemic on employment priorities: Risks and opportunities

The impact of the pandemic offers up both challenges and opportunities for shaping employment priorities in GM. Policy makers in GM are responding to and pre-empting shifts in the labour market resulting from the coronavirus outbreak and lockdown. As focus is shifting to prepare for a large wave of unemployment, there is concern that those who are already disadvantaged in the labour market will be pushed further away still. This includes gig workers, school leavers and workers with disabilities or long-term health issues.

Some interviewees raised concerns that employers are going to be less engaged with the quality work agenda as priorities change in economic recession: “pre-covid employers were more open, they were listening to these kinds of messages but in some cases they’re switched off to it because now they’re just about survival”. A similar concern was raised about job seekers: with large-scale unemployment “there is a risk... individuals will think any job is a good job right now”. Here the pandemic presents a risk of regression on recent successes that had been made in the quality employment priorities in GM.

The break from the norm represented by the lockdown offered some opportunity to advance certain employment practices and priorities in GM. Several interviewees recognised the opportunity to advance the flexible working agenda: “In terms of flexible working we’ve made

more progress in 3 months than we would've made in 3 years". The lockdown forced any employer that could to set up certain forms of flexible working practices, particularly through remote working from home. Since lockdown, the *Good Employment Charter* is refocusing on flexible work as one of its four newly prioritised principles: "flexible work has always been an important principle... it's now even more important in terms of how we build back better" (interviewee account).

What is clear now is that employers have very quickly implemented some of the recommendations suggested for overcoming barriers to creating certain flexible working practices: technological systems have been implemented to enable working away from the office; managers have had to trial alternative working structures and quickly learnt to support teams remotely; negative perceptions of remote working were dispelled as whole offices had to start working from home; and certain new job listings are advertising remote working for the foreseeable future.

We have seen some development of flexible working practices during lockdown, but these have been limited in the type of flexibility on offer, specifically remote and home working, in certain sectors and roles. Many employers have developed the tools to implement this kind of flexibility and we can expect some adaptations to continue past lockdown. But these successes have been limited to those who can do their work from home and who also have the space and capacity to work from home. For others, the remote and home working practices have not been sufficient to meet their needs to juggle greater caring responsibilities. Moving forward we need to see greater variation on the types of flexibility – particularly more flexibility around working times – to meet the needs of workers.

Overall, there exists a clear commitment from policy experts in GM to learning from the experience of the coronavirus outbreak, mitigating against the negative impact on people, businesses and the economy, and capitalising on the opportunity to make change. There was already commitment in the city-region to supporting good employment and enabling everyone to realise their potential. **Now the shakeup around the pandemic could be used as an opportunity to advance the employment priorities for various types of flexible working.** In this, informal carers and parents with caring responsibilities should be given greater recognition in future policy priorities.

Chapter 2: Strategic importance of *Caring Working Living*

Key points

- Available data shows 12.5% of working-age population in GM self-defined as informal carers, but there are many more 'hidden carers'.
- CWL showed the needs of people with caring responsibilities are not being met and support is needed to overcome barriers to labour market participation.
- GM policy makers need to explicitly identify those with caring responsibilities and should conduct thorough equality impact assessments to articulate and meet their needs.
- Learning from informal carers and their needs would help policy makers in GM to develop quality work for the wider population via a greater number and variety of flexible working practices.

2.1 Supporting the needs of informal carers in GM

Situating the CWL project in the GM policy landscape reveals a gap in the city-region's employment priorities. Confirming the findings of the literature review, interviewees stated that there are currently no specific policy responses or targeted interventions for people with caring responsibilities looking to gain or retain employment. Interviewees stated the groups that are prioritised for support into work are: those with health conditions or disabilities, older workers and those who are long-term unemployed. Whilst individuals in those groups may have caring responsibilities, programmes of support were not targeted directly at informal carers or parents. Interviews revealed an assumption that individuals with caring responsibilities might be accessing employment support in existing programmes. However, CWL showed this was not always the case. Furthermore, this does not recognise the specific needs of informal, unpaid carers, which should be considered at a strategic level.

Policy makers must negotiate the line between targeting policy to specific groups and mainstreaming policy across the wider population (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Identifying and defining segments of the population enables decision makers to design policy that meets the needs of those groups, whereas mainstreaming policy responses can meet the shared needs of many people.

Informal carers are currently not identified as having specific needs that require targeted employment support or strategic responses in GM. However, based on in-depth work with a self-selecting group of people with caring responsibilities looking for work, CWL showed that currently the needs of those with caring responsibilities are not currently being effectively met. **Existing targeted support is not always accessible, there is a lack of accessible and appropriately flexible opportunities and inclusive recruitment practices are preventing informal carers from finding employment.** This has the potential to change.

CWL recommended changes that tackle systemic exclusion of informal carers in the workplace.

Employers can **develop** flexible working practices by:

- Recognising the impact of a long-hours culture or a culture of presenteeism
- Providing training [to managers] in implementing flexible working arrangements (*Getting Ready for Flexible Working Checklist*, GMCVO)

Employers can **attract** carers to an organisation by:

- Being clear about the types of flexible working on offer
- Demonstrating a commitment to flexible working or being...an inclusive employer (*How to Attract Returners to Your Organisation Checklist*, GMCVO)

Employers can **retain** carers by offering different types of flexible work to meet the needs of their employees, which can also give benefits to the organisation

(*A Guide to Flexible Working*, GMCVO)

When asked, all policy makers who took part in the interviews expressed the importance of the CWL programme: **“there’s definitely a need for it, it’s a piece of work that is being forgotten and there is a gap”** (interviewee account). Whilst interviewees acknowledged the absence of carer-specific strategy, all were open to thinking about the particular needs of informal carers in the labour market. There is a clear argument that the needs of informal carers – and people with caring responsibilities more broadly – could be better represented within GM employment priorities. GM policy makers should explicitly identify informal carers in their decision making and conduct thorough equality impact assessments taking into account the needs of those with caring responsibilities.

2.2 Learning from informal carers to support the needs of everyone

Recommendations from the CWL project are applicable across the workforce. Participants, for whom varied flexible working practices were essential, reported difficulty finding suitable and flexible roles. The CWL toolkit aimed to increase the supply of flexible opportunities and the types of flexibility on offer to better meet demand, not only for those with caring responsibilities but the wider population.

There is much research showing the benefits of flexible working to both employers and employees. Benefits to employees include: improving work-life balance; increasing work satisfaction; enabling flexibility for caring needs; saving time and money on commuting; and makes time for education or personal lifestyles (Chung et al., 2007; OECD, 2016). Benefits to employers include: increased productivity; widening recruitment; retaining staff; and reducing absences and turnover rates (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; CIPD, 2018).

Policy experts in GM recognise the benefits of flexibility for the working population more broadly and the business sector, and as a result flexible work is a core principle of the *Good Employment Charter*. However, there is still work to be done here, as one interviewee warned that there is “no underestimation of the hill to climb on job design so it becomes more flexible... there’s a lot of shifting to make that happen”. While flexible work as a broad concept is highlighted as a policy priority, the understanding here is that in changing the culture, some types of flexibility will develop more quickly or be more popular than others.

If policy makers were better able to identify the needs of informal carers, flexible-working practices (in a variety of forms) would be recognised as a necessary change, shifting from systemic exclusion of carers from the labour market and towards greater

opportunities for participation. As priorities for flexible working develop, GM decision-makers should learn from CWL participants, and the needs of people with caring responsibilities more broadly, so that GM can meet its commitment to good employment and achieving every person's potential. Attempting to identify informal carers in GM will be a positive first step.

2.3 Filling the data gap

When discussing the needs of informal carers and sandwich carers, interviewees identified a **data gap on what is known in the GM context, that this has contributed to a gap in policy thinking.** One interviewee acknowledged: "I expect that is one of the reasons why it [a policy response for carers] has been more implicit than explicit, because actually there's a paucity of real data and evidence to say 'this is why there needs to be a focus in this area'". This presents an opportunity for researchers to fill the gaps and policy makers to make informed decisions and appropriate responses. The rest of this chapter lays out the available data, and notes the difficulties that policy researchers must overcome for further data analysis.

There are several data sets that measure numbers of informal carers in the UK and how much caring labour they do. The Census data is the most commonly referenced dataset in the existing literature. Collected every decade, the next Census in 2021 will ask "Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?", and for how many hours per week. Other data sets that provide information on informal, unpaid care include: *The Family Resources Survey Great Britain*, *Understanding Society Survey* and *European Quality of Life Survey*.⁹ Each survey may use a slightly different definition and will estimate different figures.

Researchers of unpaid and informal care note the difficulties in capturing data on this group: reporting relies on self-identification, but it can take years for people to identify themselves as carers, and common measures are likely to be under-estimating the scale and scope of informal care (Rutherford and Bu, 2018; Carers UK, 2016). As one expert interviewee put it: "I don't think we really do know... there will be a lot of 'hidden carers' where it isn't necessarily known to anybody if people are constrained by their caring responsibilities". When analysing this data, we must keep in mind that the figures are likely to be under-reporting the true scale of caring labour. This section focuses on Census data as it can be broken down to local authority level and in order to make comparisons with existing national and regional analysis.

National data

- The last Census (2011) recorded **6.5 million** total informal carers in the UK, at 12% of the adult population when the unpaid care is defined as "looking after, giving help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental ill-health/disability, or problems related to old age".
- The *Family Resources Survey 2018/19* estimates that around **4.5 million** people, or around 7% of the UK population, were providing informal care, defined as a "regular service or help to someone... within or outside of their household, and might be sick, disabled or elderly".
- Carers UK (2019) estimates the number of informal carers to be **8.8 million** and at 17% of the adult population, when they include a broader definition of caring activity including providing emotional support or arranging care.

⁹ For data on parents' work status and flexible working requests see:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2018>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents-2019>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fourth-work-life-balance-employer-survey-2013>

Working carers:

- The Census recorded **3 million people were juggling work and care** in 2011.
- Carers UK (2019) estimate that **4.87 million people were juggling work and care** in 2019.

Intersections:

- The House of Commons library notes from the *Family Resources Survey* that “each year around 60% of informal carers are women” and adults aged 55-64 were most likely to care for others (Powell et al., 2020; p. 18).
- Carers UK (2015) estimates there are 1.2 million informal carers aged 65 and over in England.
- JRF (2020) has estimated that nearly a quarter of informal carers in the UK were living in poverty in 2017/18.

Regional data

- The Census recorded **280,299** people of all ages in GM providing unpaid care for at least one hour per week in 2011.

With a focus on juggling caring and work, we turn our focus to informal carers of working-age (16-64 years old).

- There were **219,906** working-age informal, unpaid carers recorded in GM in the Census 2011, representing 78.5% of the informal carer population in GM.
- **12.5%** of the working-age population in GM identified as providing unpaid care for at least one hour per week.

Working-age carers by local authority

	Number of working-age (16-64) individuals providing any unpaid care per week	% of working-age population providing unpaid care
Bolton	23,915	13.5%
Bury	15,419	13.0%
Manchester	35,511	9.9%
Oldham	19,373	13.7%
Rochdale	18,440	13.5%
Salford	18,263	11.7%
Stockport	24,060	13.5%
Tameside	18,836	13.2%
Trafford	18,180	12.6%
Wigan	27,909	13.5%
Greater Manchester	219,906	12.5%

Source: Census 2011

12.5% of working-age population in GM self-defined as a carer. There are small differences between local authorities in terms of the rate of unpaid carers in their working-age populations. Manchester had the lowest rate of unpaid carers in the working-age population (9.9%), and Oldham had the highest (13.7%). However, Manchester had the highest count of working-age individuals providing unpaid care (35,511), significantly higher than the other local authorities.

Age of carers in GM

	Number of unpaid carers in GM in this age bracket	% of population in this age bracket who are carers
Age 16 to 24	19,053	6%
Age 25 to 34	29,441	8%
Age 35 to 49	78,166	14%
Age 50 to 64	93,246	20%
Age 65+	54,113	14%

Source: Census 2011. Percentages rounded.

The greatest representation of informal carers is found in the 50 to 64 age bracket, where one fifth (20%) identify as carers.

Sex of carers in GM and North West

Data on the sex of informal carers is limited and only available at city-region level. In addition, data is only available for those aged 16 years and older, not for the working-age population.

	Number of unpaid carers aged 16+	Male	Female
Greater Manchester	274,019	116,314 (42%)	157,705 (58%)

Source: Census 2011

Breaking the data down by age and sex is only possible at regional level. The table below shows that working-age women in the North West are more likely to be carers than men; however, this discrepancy closes for the 65+ category.

	Number of unpaid carers in NW	Male	Female
Age 16 to 24	45,427	45%	55%
Age 25 to 34	69,235	39%	61%
Age 35 to 49	207,533	39%	61%
Age 50 to 64	274,143	42%	58%
Age 65+	166,856	49%	51%

Source: Census 2011

Ethnicity of carers in GM

Data are also limited when looking at the ethnicity of informal carers in GM, and available only for the 16+ age group, not the working-age population. The table below shows fairly minimal differences in the proportion of carers between the ethnic groups, with the largest discrepancy being between people whose ethnicity is 'White' and people whose ethnicity is 'Mixed' or 'Other ethnic heritage' (11% compared to 6% and 6%, respectively).

	Number of unpaid carers 16+	% of population in this ethnic group who are carers
Asian	23,670	9%
Black	4,960	7%
White	246,366	11%
Mixed ethnicity	3,764	6%
Other ethnic group	1,539	6%

Source: Census 2011. Percentages rounded.

Number of hours caring by working-age carers in GM

	Number of unpaid carers in GM in this age bracket	Hours of unpaid caring per week:		
		1-19 hrs	20-49 hrs	50+ hrs
Age 16 to 24	19,053	13,301	3,385	2,367
Age 25 to 34	29,441	18,303	4,708	6,430
Age 35 to 49	78,166	48,332	12,138	17,696
Age 50 to 64	93,246	59,313	13,452	20,481
Total working-age carers	219,906 (100%)	139,249 (63%)	33,683 (15%)	46,974 (21%)

Source: Census 2011. Percentages rounded.

Three in five working-age carers in GM (63%) did 1-19 hours of unpaid care per week. This represents nearly 140,000 informal carers who may be able to participate in the labour market, dependent on their other needs. One in five working-age carers did 50 or more hours of caring per week (21%). Working-age carers were least likely to do 20-49 hours of caring per week (15%).

In summary, the data available provides some insight into the population and demographics of informal, unpaid carers in GM. These data are likely to show conservative figures due to under-reporting, and the fact that there is likely to be many more 'hidden carers' not accounted for in the data. A substantial amount of unpaid care work may not be captured. **In recognising the limitations of the available data, we can use this to think more broadly about the needs of everyone who has caring responsibilities:** those who do not self-define as carers, parents caring for children, and many others who perform caring labour that falls outside existing measures of who is a carer.

During the policy-development process in GM (and beyond), equalities impact assessments should be conducted to measure and articulate the needs of those with caring responsibilities and consideration should be given to the intersection of carers' needs and other protected characteristics; particularly age and sex, as revealed in the data above.

Chapter 3: Maximising the impact of *Caring Working Living*

Key points

- Political will exists in GM to bring about more inclusive and flexible employment, but the mechanisms to make change are limited.
- Currently, soft policy mechanisms are used in GM to shape good quality work through: convening, network-building, educating, and innovating.
- Further mechanisms could be used, such as: financial incentives, leveraging government buying power, calling out bad practices, integrating programme funding and innovating through greater devolved powers.
- The pandemic has increased the take up of remote working, whilst also highlighting the importance of unpaid caring labour. We need to learn from informal carers and encourage broader work flexibility to benefit all.

3.1 Maximising learning from the *Caring Working Living* project

The CWL project has offered an innovative approach to collaborating with informal carers and employers, exposing the barriers that prevent informal carers from joining the GM workforce. More inclusive recruitment processes and a greater number and variety of flexible employment opportunities are required. All interviewees saw value in the CWL project and some advocated for the impact it has already had on the sector – particularly in the work of the *Good Employment Charter*. The project aligned with GM priorities on: a) quality work with equality of opportunity, and b) ensuring everyone can reach their potential. However, CWL also highlighted the gap around the policy response for informal carers and parents with caring responsibilities, particularly those not currently working but looking to participate in the labour market.

CWL emphasises the value in GM's priority for quality employment, to not only support those in work but also to increase labour market participation in the future. Policy makers can learn from CWL. Greater recognition could be given to the population of informal carers in GM. In the discussion on quality employment, acknowledgment should be given to the needs of people juggling working and caring responsibilities in the GM labour market. In recognising the experiences of and barriers to those with caring responsibilities, we begin to recognise the vital importance of various types of flexible working, which can make the difference between labour market inclusion or exclusion. As caring responsibilities can differ greatly, rather than looking for a one-size-fits-all approach for carers, **policy makers in GM should be encouraging employers to offer various types of flexible working**, as defined in the GMCVO *Guide to Flexible Working* (2020), to meet the needs of the individual.

CWL has shown there is both an evidence gap and a gap in policy when it comes to informal caring labour in GM. The data provided in this report should go some way to addressing the evidence gap. This presents an opportunity for policy makers to consider an active response to supporting people with caring responsibilities in a more inclusive labour market. During the policy-development process and in equalities impact assessments, consideration should be given to who performs caring labour and therefore how carers' needs intersect with other protected characteristics, particularly age and sex.

The CWL toolkit offers practical guidance aimed at employers. This goes some way to filling a gap noted by interviewees that previous attempts to influence employers had been framed in the language of good will and benevolence. The CWL toolkit is a practical, business-facing resource, guiding employers through the steps from developing flexible working practices to recruiting in an inclusive way. It was created using local perspectives from employers and carers and the toolkit is now directly available from the *Good Employment Charter* website.¹⁰

3.2 Impacting through governance structures and policy levers

In order to make impact, we must understand the governance structures in GM and the levers through which change can be made. Interviewees shared their insights, that the Local Authorities are the “conveners or managers of place” developing their own strategies, as well as supporting city-region strategy, recognising gaps in services and integrating programmes to avoid duplication. The GMCA (a partnership of equals with the ten Local Authority leaders and directly elected Metro Mayor) is recognised for its ability to develop a city-regional policy programme and to integrate policy areas, especially where powers have been devolved. With combined thinking and devolved powers, **GM’s strengths come from the ability to localise and at once integrate priorities and strategies across the city-region.** To improve the position of informal carers in the labour market, as CWL aims to do, impact must be both localised and integrated: 1) connected with each Local Authority to understand and meet local need, and 2) collaborative at a GM-level to ensure lasting influence across the regional economy. There is also scope to share findings and good practice with national policy makers.

Employment and skills policy and spending is not entirely devolved, and levers to make change on employment priorities are constrained by national government policy and funding. As one interviewee said on employment programmes “the policy work behind them has already been decided... in most cases they come within predefined parameters set by government”. Yet in this context GM decision makers are finding opportunities to shape and bend national policy to meet local need: “we can better wrap local services and complementary provision around what has been predefined by government. So we might be able to flex and change some of the policies... leveraging in the things we’ve got some control over” (interviewee account). Funding for employment programmes and support may sit within the national government remit but with a greater understanding of local need and combined power to make integrated change across the city-region, GM policy makers are able to push their priorities using the levers at their disposal.

Soft policy¹¹ mechanisms are being used in the city-region to shape good quality work for all citizens. These include:

- Using the convening power of high-profile actors – particularly the GMCA’s drive on the quality work agenda and power to engage businesses.
- Building networks – particularly of employers, the key example being the *Good Employment Charter* where quality work is being mainstreamed.
- Educating businesses on quality working principles – through networks, handbooks, toolkits, webinars and workshops (Charter networks and workshops, GMCA handbooks, The Growth Company workshops and webinars were mentioned in interviews).
- Innovating through devolved powers to target services to local need – such as the Working Well programme.

¹⁰ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/the-charter/flexible-work/>

¹¹ Soft policy is done through recommendations, campaigns and advocacy as opposed to hard policy that is done through legislation, regulation and sanctioning. Conceptions of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ policy are applied in the literature on multi-level systems of governance (Torenvlied and Akkerman, 2004).

Existing work by policy makers and partner organisations to improve the quality of employment practices in the city-region uses these mechanisms of soft policy, with the core purpose of influencing employer behaviour. This soft policy has so far been used to get employers on side and build the movement towards quality employment with them. This is particularly clear with The *Good Employment Charter* that has been designed in consultation with businesses throughout. The movement towards quality work as standard also has to begin with good practice of government bodies and anchor organisations leading the way. As one interviewee admitted: “there’s still more work that we can do in terms of leading by example”. Leading by example is one of the softest and easiest levers for change. CWL’s findings also showed some informal carers had been unable to access existing employment services and support programmes. Access to employment support services could be widened to address carers’ needs to build confidence, work experience and up-to-date skills.

The GM Employment and Skills Partnership (ESAP) has been pushing for further leverage in this policy area. ESAP submitted a paper to the Treasury with a number of ‘asks’ for labour market interventions from the one-year Spending Review. These included: all DWP contracted programmes operating in GM to be co-commissioned with GMCA, working with DWP policy and commercial functions; specific immediate commitment to commission a new programme to address anticipated increase in long-term unemployment; and a commitment to continue funding for the current Work and Health Programme. It is clear for GM policy makers that supporting labour market recovery from the coronavirus lockdown will require a close partnership between the Department for Education, Department of Work and Pensions and Greater Manchester partners, building on existing GM employment priorities and work around the GM LIS. There are opportunities for an integrated approach to a more inclusive labour market recovery, if GM were granted the powers by central government.

Harder mechanisms currently being used in GM and discussed in interviews included:

- Leveraging the buying power of government through social value in procurement – enabling local and city-regional government to act as a discerning customer to encourage good employment practices when buying services.
- Finding opportunities for regulation through soft powers – e.g. using the influencing power of high-profile actors to call out poor business behaviour.

Additional mechanisms could include:

- Stronger standards setting on quality work from the employee side – collaborating with citizens on the quality work agenda, educating on their rights and encouraging more employees to request flexible working practices.
- Financial incentives for businesses to encourage behaviour change.
- More innovation opportunities to meet the needs of different groups in the labour market and test interventions (such as CWL).
- Innovating further through greater devolved powers (as requested by ESAP).

This report has shown that there is some political will to act on supporting people with caring responsibilities to participate in the labour market, particularly where this connects with city-region priorities to improve the quality of work and encourage more flexible working practices.

GM is able to push ahead with these more inclusive employment strategies because political will drives more inclusive policy development and devolved governance structures enable more inclusive policy delivery.

3.3 Looking ahead

The coronavirus pandemic has deeply impacted the economy, labour market, business priorities and policy planning. Currently, there are many concerns about the fallout of the pandemic on economic recovery, the end of the furlough scheme, and mass unemployment – all of which are unknowns at the time of writing. However, in this shake up there may also be opportunities to make some positive change.

The coronavirus outbreak has forced a greater proportion of the population to take the role of carers and forced the public to recognise the value of unpaid caring labour in our society. Indeed, on 4 May the government defined unpaid carers as “essential workers” and a priority group for testing. In lockdown, caring labour has been brought to the foreground through care for older or vulnerable people who were shielding from the virus, and parents who have been caring full-time for children while schools were closed. The time is ripe to make the case for better supporting the specific needs of those with caring responsibilities.

The lockdown also forced anyone who could work from home to do so remotely, showing many employers that introducing new forms of flexibility was perhaps not as difficult as some had assumed. However, during this time employers have not necessarily increased access to other forms of flexible working, such as annualised hours, term-time working, compressed hours or job sharing (CIPD, 2020). **The pandemic has increased the take up of remote working, but the case now needs to be made to broaden the types of flexible opportunities to meet the needs of people with varied caring responsibilities.**

Coming out of lockdown, there will be opportunities to hold on to some of the successes of greater access to flexible working practices, particularly in remote working, with more employers having processes in place to provide these opportunities in the future. We can expect to see more employees requesting continued flexibility if it has worked for them, however the experience of remote working will depend hugely on other privileges (such as space to work at home) and caring responsibilities. It remains to be seen how far these will be lasting cultural shifts towards greater access to flexible working, and to what extent this can lead to a wider variety of flexibilities to support a more inclusive labour market.

It is in all our interest to enable people to work and contribute to the economy if they wish to. The fact that people with caring responsibilities find it difficult to juggle work and care, comes at a high cost estimated to be £3 billion to the public purse and £8 billion to businesses annually, as well as great personal cost to individuals who wish to earn money, be a positive role model and gain a sense of identity through work. Therefore, supporting individuals with caring responsibilities to enter and stay in the workforce is of moral and economic importance. As policy makers genuinely try to tackle the big issues of unemployment, child poverty, low productivity and the impacts of an ageing population, the case for improving access to flexible working is undeniable. **Policy makers need to learn from informal carers and encourage broader work flexibilities to benefit all. There is more work to be done and more levers to use to make this change a reality in GM.**

Conclusion

Informal unpaid caring labour is essential to sustaining day-to-day life. Yet caring labour has historically been overlooked and undervalued by policy makers worldwide. The coronavirus pandemic has brought into sharp focus the vital importance of unpaid care work in our society, and the difficulties of juggling care and work.

In GM, support for people with caring responsibilities in the labour market has at best been implicit in the strategic aims to develop quality employment for everyone, and at worst a blind spot where informal carers' needs have been siloed and neglected.

This report has shown that within GM's existing employment priorities there was strategic importance for GMCVO's *Caring Working Living* project. Through in-depth work with a self-selecting group of people with caring responsibilities looking for paid work, CWL showed that their needs are not being successfully met and further support is required to overcome barriers to entering and retaining employment. CWL called for greater access to flexible opportunities in the labour market, more inclusive recruitment from employers and additional support initiatives to update skills and increase confidence for people with caring responsibilities looking to (re-)enter the workforce.

A preliminary step to supporting this group is to identify the number of informal, unpaid carers across GM. Analysis in this report used Census data to measure the number of informal carers in the city-region. As the next Census take place in March 2021, it will be important in offering accessible and updated information to policy makers on the informal carer population and demographic make up.¹² In addition, with local authorities already playing a crucial role in the identification and assessment of carer's needs, they are well placed to gather and report data to GMCA on informal carers, employment status and wellbeing.

Tackling the barriers for people with caring responsibilities to gain and retain employment is: good for employers who could save an estimated £8 billion a year on absences and poor retention nationally; good for policy makers who could save an estimated £3 billion of public spending a year on retaining informal carers in the workforce; and good for informal carers who make up at least 12.5% of the working-age population in GM.

Recommendations for overcoming barriers to employment for informal, unpaid carers from CWL and existing reports are widely available. These include improving access to flexible working opportunities and inclusive recruitment on the employer side, as well as employability support to update skills and increase confidence on the employee side. In GM there may be limited formal powers to deliver these recommendations through employment policy; however, there is a promising context of political will and vision to make use of the levers for change to create more inclusive and quality employment for all.

Thus far, soft policy mechanisms are being used to make this change in GM, such as educating employers on principles of quality work, shaping national programmes to meet local need and network-building around the *Good Employment Charter*. Some harder policy mechanisms are available: leveraging social value, financial incentives, educating job seekers/employees on the principles of quality work. With devolved powers in the city-region, we in GM have the opportunity to meet the needs of people with caring responsibilities and tackle barriers to employment. This begins with political leadership and responsibility with the GMCA executive, and explicitly identifying informal carers in future policy development.

¹² For information on how other countries measure the informal carer population, see: <https://eurocarers.org/country-profiles/>

One recognised positive outcome of the coronavirus lockdown has been the rapid normalisation of certain flexible working practices, as remote working was written in to the Governments' national coronavirus restrictions. But we now know that successes of remote working were dependent on certain privileges of home working space and juggling caring responsibilities. It has become clear that lockdown measures had a disproportionately negative impact on women who did less paid work and more unpaid caring. Going forward, we would wish to continue the momentum towards greater access to flexible working practices. However, broader flexibilities must be galvanised, beyond remote working. We particularly need to see greater flexibility of work patterns to meet the needs of more people in the workforce, with the ultimate aim of encouraging greater inclusivity and diversity in the labour market.

If the pandemic really is an opportunity to build back better for everyone, policy makers must learn from the experience of informal carers, for whom flexible working can be the distinction between inclusion or systematic exclusion from the labour market. Meeting their needs for different types of flexible working, inclusive recruitment and employability support will help to improve the quality of employment for all. Lessons on supporting people with caring responsibilities can be mainstreamed into the GM vision for inclusive and quality employment for all. However, **where previously a response to supporting informal carers may have been implicit in GM's strategic planning, it is now important that informal carers and their unpaid care work is explicitly named.** Looking ahead, policy makers in GM must begin to make active and explicit decisions to support those with caring responsibilities in the labour market. Informal carers and their needs should be clearly named in GM employment policy priorities, and commitments should be made to identifying and reporting data on informal carers and their lived experiences. There should also be an assurance to conducting equality impact assessments that acknowledge the experiences of informal carers and recognise how unpaid caring labour intersects with protected characteristics.

This project has broadly offered insight on the successes of devolution as a powerful tool to deliver localised and integrated policies to improve the quality of work in the city-region. Overall, there is hope that mainstreamed priorities in our city-region can deliver better responses to the complex intersecting lives and needs of real people in GM.

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To address the policy gap for people with caring responsibilities, as identified by this report, and to make the GM labour market more inclusive and accessible, the following steps can be taken:

Conclusion 1

GMCA should commit to tackling barriers to entering and retaining employment for people caring responsibilities. GMCA and DWP to jointly **develop targeted programmes** of support for informal carers, and GMCA to ensure informal carers are explicitly named and **embedded into all mainstream employment priorities and work programmes.**

Conclusion 2

Leadership and responsibility for informal carers in the labour market should sit with the GMCA executive lead for Age-Friendly GM and Equalities.

Conclusion 3

GM Local Authorities should be responsible for **identifying** the informal carer population and **reporting** to GMCA. GMCA to use this data to **explicitly identify and report** on those with caring responsibilities in all future policy development.

Conclusion 4

All future GMCA policy development to include an **equalities impact assessment**, which recognises that informal, unpaid care work intersects with the protected characteristics of age and sex.

Conclusion 5

The **Good Employment Charter to connect to the Carers' Charter** and ensure the needs of informal carers and benefits of including them in a diverse workforce are explicitly addressed.

Conclusion 6

Building on the success of the CWL panel, the **Good Employment Charter** should set up a fully representative employee and job-seeker panel (to include informal carers) to engage in future Charter development and the good quality work movement.

Conclusion 7

The GMCA/LEP/Local Authority responses to the coronavirus pandemic must **harness equality principles** to meet the needs of those furthest from the labour market.

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