

Research Briefing Note

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# Understanding whether local employment charters could support fairer employment practices

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## Summary

Employment charters are voluntary initiatives that attempt to describe 'good' employment practices and to engage and recognise those employers that meet or aspire to meet these practices. They can operate at different spatial scales, ranging from international and national accreditation schemes to local charters that focus on engaging employers in specific regions or cities. The latter are the focus of this briefing paper. At least six city-regions in England had local employment charters at the time of our research. These areas alone account for over a fifth (21 per cent) of the resident working-age population (based on ONS 2022 population estimates), highlighting the potential reach and significance of these voluntary initiatives in terms of setting employment standards, although the number of employers directly accredited with local schemes is still relatively small.

Despite their popularity with policymakers, there is only limited research on local employment charters. A few studies have explored issues relating to the design, implementation and evaluation of charters, reflecting demand from policymakers for toolkits and support to develop local policy initiatives (e.g. Crozier, 2022). But several years into the implementation of some of these charter initiatives, and as more areas look to develop their own, we argue that it is time to revisit some more foundational questions around what local charters are for, and how far they can support 'good work' agendas. It remains to be seen which employers can and will engage substantively with these initiatives, how employer commitments might be validated and the good employment criteria enforced, and how local charters will be integrated with local authority commissioning and procurement practices (TUC, 2022).

The local charters that have emerged so far within the UK have been conceived predominantly as employer engagement tools, adopting language and approaches designed to appeal to employer interests and priorities and emphasising the value that employers can derive from being part of the initiative. This contrasts with approaches emphasising the engagement of other constituents, like citizens and employees, as a route to influencing employer engagement (Scott, Baylor and Spaulding, 2016; Johnson, Herman and Hughes, 2022).

This briefing paper shares findings from a scoping study involving key informants in the North West of England (2022-2023) which explored how local charter initiatives could influence employers to improve their employment practices. Participants in the study shared their views on:

- 1) How voluntary local employment charters could influence employers to change their employment practices?
- 2) What types of employers local charters could engage and influence?

Alongside this study, we have also developed a series of case studies of the charters that have been introduced across six city regions in England. These encompass the Fair Work Standard (London); Good Employment Charter (West of England); Good Work Pledge (North of Tyne Combined Authority); Fair Employment Charter (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority); Good Employment Charter (Greater Manchester) and the Fair Work Charter (West Yorkshire Combined Authority). The case studies are included as an annex.

Our conversations with policymakers, union representatives and campaigners indicate that while there are some potential 'win-win' outcomes from promoting good employment practices, there are also some key tensions that should be more clearly acknowledged. In particular, one point of divergence relates to what would be the most effective and meaningful way to engage with employers in order to secure improvements in employment practices. On the one hand, employment charter initiatives could set consistent, clear and relatively high standards of practice that employers could be required to meet from the outset, creating a clear dividing line between those employers who were engaged in some way with the initiative and those who are not. On the other, these initiatives could prioritise engaging as many employers as possible with few or no specific red lines (e.g. around paying the living wage) so that the charter provides an opportunity to work with employers to secure hopefully more substantive commitments down the road.

There are challenges and trade-offs associated with both of these viewpoints. One problem with the former strategy of setting a consistent standard is that the principles of employment that the charter promotes may not be particularly stretching in some sectors, or indeed may only describe a minimum set of commitments for certain types of work; whilst in other sectors they may be viewed as being too stringent. A more incremental, flexible strategy of engaging with employers and working with them to change their employment practices, in contrast, relies on sustained commitment from both policymakers and employers. Whether charters can simultaneously offer a 'safe space' to employers to share information and change their practices whilst also operating in a more regulatory way appears as a fundamental tension in existing visions for these initiatives. We return to these different views on how to engage employers and secure change in the conclusion to this paper.

## Introduction

Employment charters can be viewed as part of a new patchwork of rules and regulations that are attempting to enhance labour standards through an ensemble of institutional practices that are not simply related to the legislative or enforcement sphere of the traditional state (Wright et al, 2019). This is a development that links to a range of indirect and soft regulations that have developed in response to an ever more fragmented and marketised economic system (Martínez Lucio and MacKenzie, 2004). While devolved authorities within the UK are not formally charged with promoting employment standards and have limited powers in this regard, they nonetheless have some scope to influence employment practices. In recent years, voluntary local employment charters have been proposed and implemented in several areas within the UK, including many of the new mayoral combined authority areas (Dickinson, 2022).

There are similarities between the different charter initiatives that are emerging across city-regions in terms of how they are designed, with most offering different levels, or tiers, of membership; and a focus on engaging employers (rather than citizens, workers or consumers) in order to try to secure change. But there are also emerging differences around how they attempt to influence employers to change their employment practices, and they are also being implemented in different political and institutional contexts (McKay and Moore, 2023). Across the six city regions that were implementing local employment charters at the time of our research, all were headed by an elected Labour mayor.<sup>1</sup>

This project set out to identify the potential mechanisms through which employment charters can promote fairer employment practices, drawing in particular on participants' experiences of engaging with different initiatives within the North West of England. There were at least four local employment charter initiatives being implemented or under development in the region at the time of our consultation. The Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region employment charters were relatively established examples operating at city-region level in the UK. In addition, the Cheshire and Warrington LEP and Lancaster city council were also consulting on the development of local charters.

This briefing paper draws on a series of workshops organized as a part of a collaboration project between the Work and Equalities Institute, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, the TUC North West and Unison. Each workshop brought together several policymakers, activists and academics separately to share their views on the role and potential of local good employment charters. The workshops were conducted between November 2022 and February 2023, with follow up interviews and conversations enabling exploration of key themes and developments. The findings from the workshops were then subjected to further scrutiny during a second case study phase, which involved interviews with actors involved in developing charters in other parts of England. Overall, 30 people participated in the project, including 18 participants in the three consultative workshops in the North West.

While our research participants often referred to specific initiatives in workshop discussions and interviews, the findings reported here draw on insights from across different charter initiatives and are not intended as an evaluation of individual initiatives. Many contributors were engaged in the development of charters in more than one area, and there were also differing views around how charters were meant to influence employer practices both within and across different initiatives. The next sections describe the different approaches to influencing employers that were identified by participants, and their views on the ways local charters could engage different types of employer.

<sup>1</sup> To our knowledge, none of the Conservative-controlled mayoral combined authorities were pursuing an employment charter at this time. The West Midlands Combined Authority instead promotes an accreditation scheme aiming to promote employee health and wellbeing in the workplace

## Views on the types of employers that local charters can and should engage

Local charters are widely badged as being for all employers. But participants acknowledged that particular types of employers might be more likely to engage in a voluntary charter: employers with a strong connection to place, whose head office was based locally and some smaller employers were thought to have stronger incentives to engage. Whereas ‘[if] you’re a particularly large employer, you don’t need that... photo with [the mayor], you can get [him] to come to your events any time you want if you’re a firm of a particular size’ (activist participant). Embedding charters in procurement and commissioning processes could also provide an incentive. Public sector employers were identified as key targets for engagement on the grounds that charters tend to be led by local politicians and public sector authorities who are themselves employers and procurers of goods and services. However, charter commitments relating to paying the living wage, in particular, pose challenges for local authorities given they are responsible for commissioning publicly funded social care services.

Meanwhile, participants identified a number of characteristics that might reduce employer engagement. In terms of sectors, employers in the retail and hospitality and care sectors were identified as being less likely to engage, particularly given the pay and conditions associated with work in these sectors. The types of commitment that were identified as being particularly challenging for employers, particularly in the view of the activists and campaigners that were consulted, related to payment of the living wage, limiting the use of zero hour contracts, guaranteed hours, requirements to engage with trade unions, and, for some sectors, widening access to sick pay. The reasons varied from the direct impact on employer wage bills, to differences between charter criteria and sector-level agreements with unions. Some participants also highlighted the potential for employers to interpret charter requirements around trade union engagement and employee voice as an attempt to force them to recognise a union, which could reduce employer engagement, particularly where employers view unions as adversaries.

## Different visions of how employment charters can promote better employment

Across all the groups involved in the consultation – i.e. the policy actors, activists, trade union representatives and academics – there was broad support for the idea that employment charters should work with employers to change their employment practices, rather than engaging with them only once they were judged to be meeting the criteria set out in the charter.

Participants emphasised that the value of local charters lay not in recognising good practice per se but in the extent to which initiatives engaged and worked with employers to change their employment practices in light of the context in which these firms operate. Despite this, no local charters to our knowledge explicitly apply higher or lower thresholds for assessing employment practices across different types of sectors. Instead flexibility is often built into the assessment process at the level of individual employer assessments, where employers may marshal different types of evidence to show that they are meeting the charter criteria. Some initiatives also explicitly apply fewer or adjusted criteria to smaller employers (e.g. the London Good Work Standard).

**Table 1: Potential mechanisms through which local charters might influence employer practices**

| Potential mechanism                                                       | How it might work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Who it targets                                                                                 | Reflections and assumptions based on consultation data                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Badges and recognition</b>                                             | Employers may be motivated to sign up because they want to be associated with the 'brand', to get a badge, meet with the mayor, attend an award ceremony and gain recognition as a 'good' employer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Employers                                                                                      | Policy and practice leads termed this the 'traditional' view of how voluntary charters engage employers.<br><br>All participants discussed this aspect but it was not viewed as a sufficient strategy on its own                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Incentives through procurement</b>                                     | Organisations wanting to contract with the lead authority (and/or other local institutions, anchors etc) may be asked to demonstrate that they are engaging with the charter; or charter accreditation could be weighed as a part of contracting decisions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Employers who compete for contracts from the charter lead, or who are part of the supply chain | Requires political leadership and technical, legal support e.g. some uncertainty around whether legally permitted to require compliance with charter criteria in procurement.<br><br>Requires buy-in across teams within the lead organisation, and may take time to set up<br><br>Participants from a union and campaigning background were concerned that the threshold for engaging with charter initiatives may be set too low, e.g. allowing organisations who were only early stage supporters to claim the benefits of being associated with the charter |
| <b>Diagnosis and persuasion</b>                                           | The charter assessment and engagement process may enable policymakers, campaigners, employers and other actors to better understand why some employers believe it is not possible for them to implement better employment practices.<br><br>Other actors may change their processes (e.g. contracting and commissioning approaches) in order to reduce or remove these barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Employers<br>Campaigners<br><br>Policymakers – national and local<br><br>Commissioners         | Identifying how far external barriers prevent employers from adopting fairer employment practices is not straightforward<br><br>Some participants raised concerns that action to address perceived barriers, e.g. paying more to contractors, may not filter through to improved conditions for employees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Employer education and learning strategies</b>                         | The charter may operate as a learning network between employers as well as bringing in other stakeholders, helping to raise awareness of what employers can do differently and how they can initiate change<br><br>Regular network events, themed sessions and site visits, for example, provide opportunities to learn about different approaches<br><br>Other providers, campaigners etc can access a network of employers enabling them to raise awareness and potentially recruit employers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Employers, particularly perhaps those with limited HR resource<br><br>Campaigners              | Assumes the learning shared between employers is conducive to improving employment practices for employees, poor practices could also be shared<br><br>It was assumed that employers would be more willing to learn from other employers rather than other providers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Compliance and enforcement</b>                                         | Encompassing both the idea of widening the accountability of employers – e.g. through opening up the charter application data to wider scrutiny – as well as building in compliance checks<br><br>Charters could establish compliance checks, e.g. annual reviews or spot-checks to ensure employers are still meeting the requirements<br><br>Whistleblowing processes could allow employees, trade unions and other activists to raise concerns<br><br>Charter data (criteria, employer members and even employer application data) could also be made more widely available allowing others to hold employers to account for the commitments. This could also enable the local electorate to hold local politicians to account for the success of the charter, e.g. in terms of securing meaningful and/or widespread employer engagement | Employers engaging directly with the charter<br><br>Local policy and political actors          | Unclear whether there is sufficient public awareness of charters for wider accountability mechanisms to be effective, although this could change<br><br>Annual checks likely to require resource, e.g. internal review team<br><br>Campaigners and union representative were interested in whether employer application data could be made public                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Bringing external pressure through social and community engagement</b> | Raising awareness and demand for good employment practices among other groups (e.g. workers, potential workers, citizens)<br><br>Building a citizen or employee based movement around charters<br><br>Charters could be used by the public and workforce specifically as a benchmark for them to assess the working conditions they are offered, potentially placing pressure on employers to improve their offer to employees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Local residents<br><br>Potential and current employees                                         | Acknowledged as a largely untested mechanism<br><br>There was uncertainty about whether a local charter could achieve the recognition that might be needed amongst the local workforce to work in this way                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Several potential mechanisms for influencing employers and improving employment practices were discussed by participants. From these we identified six broad types which are summarised in Table 1. The first two are concerned with reinforcing incentives for employers to voluntarily engage with the initiative. The third and fourth types of mechanism emphasise the charter as a means of raising awareness and sharing information, although each relies on different assumptions about how change can be secured. The fifth type of mechanism emphasises compliance and enforcement as potential mechanisms for securing improvements in employment practices because they afford ways to assess whether there is congruence between charter criteria and commitments and employer practices. Finally, a further and largely untested mechanism discussed by participants was the idea that charters could help to drive up demand for better employment amongst employees, workers and others, thereby placing external pressure on employers to change. Individual charter initiatives may pursue one or several of these strategies, but participants were sceptical that they were all necessarily complementary. Some of these mechanisms have the potential to influence employers who are not directly engaged with local charters as members or even as potential applicants, e.g. through influencing wider norms or the practices of commissioning bodies.

## Discussion and key points

Local employment charters are viewed by many as a welcome addition to local policy and campaigning efforts to secure better employment, particularly given the limited institutions and partnerships available to support conversations with employers around good employment practices (Simms, 2023) and the near constant upheaval of institutional arrangements supporting local economic development at local level (Westwood, Sensier and Pike, 2021). Across the interviews and workshops conducted for this scoping study, participants highlighted the value and potential of these initiatives, with some ascribing them wider significance in terms of their potential to test and embed the kinds of employment standards that could be promoted nationally.

Those involved directly in the development and implementation of charters emphasised their value as a means of engaging positively and incrementally with employers, including providing resources and information about good practice and also learning about perceived barriers to implementing better employment practices. Charters could also be used to prompt business support intermediaries to have conversations with employers around job quality and how they might engage with the charter, rather than focussing on more traditional topics like productivity and skills. Another potential benefit lies in them helping to establish productive conversations between employers and others working on employment issues, away from more adversarial contexts. One charter lead noted 'there's an image issue and a lack of understanding of trade unions and what they do, and fear from a lot of employers as well'.

But the focus on engaging incrementally with employers also raises concerns, particularly for some campaigners and activists. These concerns centred around the flexible approach to defining good employment practices, which means that employers are not necessarily being held to a clear and consistent standard across some of the dimensions of good employment that charters promote. Participants on the charter implementation side acknowledged there was a balance to be struck between taking a flexible and open approach and holding employers to consistent good standards of employment.

Some also highlighted where they thought there were blind spots or gaps in how local employment charters attempted to define good employment and change employer practices. Strategies to engage and empower citizens and (potential) workers, rather than employers, were identified as a potential mechanism to secure change but these were relatively under-developed or absent in current charter approaches. It was suggested that charters should try to raise awareness amongst employees of their rights and that information about whether employers were recognised by the charter could be included on recruitment websites so that potential recruits could weigh this information.

A further concern was that charters do not sufficiently recognise and address inequalities in power in the employment relationship. Their symbolic power of 'recognising good employers' might in fact lead to complacency with workers assuming that their employer is treating them well because they are accredited by the charter, rather than scrutinising how policies were being applied. Mechanisms to validate and enforce, or check up on, employer commitments were also not particularly visible, and concerns were raised about the level of resource available to support these activities and the lack of transparency around how employers were assessed and reviewed. This dilemma also links to the uneven development of worker and especially trade union voice and influence in the national context as well, which often limits local regional developments that seek to improve social dialogue (Johnson, et al. 2023).

The different views highlighted above speak to broader competing ideas or theories about how voluntary charter initiatives can support meaningful change in employer practices. The charters discussed in the context of this scoping study have focussed on building legitimacy with employers as a route to securing change. The case for emphasising an incremental, flexible approach rests on an argument that more can be achieved by treating the charter as an engagement tool and reaching as many employers as possible by keeping initial commitments to a minimum and then requiring employers to work towards the fuller set of commitments. Under this approach, the charter is viewed as offering employers a 'safe space' in which to explore alternative approaches and to learn about employment practices that might benefit their employees. If this strategy secures wider and more varied engagement, the argument goes, there may be greater potential for the charter to change employer practices than through a strategy of setting higher standards and emphasising scrutiny and regulation, which, some assumed, would lead to lower employer engagement, and/or engagement of the 'usual suspects' who were already able to meet the criteria.

But the risks associated with this approach should be kept in view alongside the potential rewards. The idea of employers engaging and progressing over time from an initial, low-level commitment presupposes sustained engagement on the part of the employer, rather than them treating the charter as something they sign up to and forget about. Whether the standard that employers are being held to is high enough is an important question, as is the issue of whether there is a meaningful distinction within a given charter initiative between those employers that are signalling their intention to improve versus those that do implement changes. Creating a safe and positive space for employers to discuss how they might change their employment practices is also potentially incompatible with calls for a more regulatory and transparent approach to assessing employer practices.

These theories merit further scrutiny given empirical gaps in our understanding of how local charters work to influence employers over the longer term. Overall, this study underscores the need for clear guidelines and reporting of charter engagement and outcome data. If the value of charters lies in their ability to influence and support employers to change their employment practices, then we need to pay attention not just to the number of employers that are engaged but also to understanding what changes these initiatives have supported, which kinds of employers have been engaged and how they are 'progressing' through any tiers of membership, and how charters connect to, influence or potentially displace wider efforts to promote access to decent work.



## Further reading and references

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Please get in touch if you have any feedback or have found this briefing paper useful. Contact Ceri Hughes on [ceri.hughes@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:ceri.hughes@manchester.ac.uk), or reach out to the Work Equalities Institute on [wei@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:wei@manchester.ac.uk)



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# **Annex: Case studies of city region employment charters**

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| Scheme                                                         | Lead / area              | Approach and design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Governance and funding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <p>Good Work Standard</p> <p><i>Active since 2019</i></p>      | Greater London Authority | <p>There are two possible levels of accreditation – Achievement and Excellence</p> <p>Initially, employers complete an online foundation checklist to check their compliance with minimum standards and legal requirements before they are invited to complete a full self-assessment form. This asks employers to review their employment practices across four dimensions, or 'pillars'. Their responses are used to determine the level of accreditation.</p> <p>The four key pillars that employer practices are assessed against are (1) fair pay and conditions; (2) workplace wellbeing; (3) skills and progression; (4) diversity and recruitment.</p> <p>Employers do not need to meet all the criteria specified for each pillar, but must meet a set threshold (a percentage) of the criteria that apply under each pillar to be accredited. The threshold varies with the size of employer and level of accreditation, but accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation (LWF) is a core requirement for all employers. The Good Work Standard team also work with the LWF to cross-refer employers to each programme.</p> <p>Small businesses (with fewer than 250 employees) must meet a minimum of 75% of the Achievement-level criteria overall and within each pillar to accredit at this level; or to reach Excellence level they must achieve 80% of the Achievement-level criteria and at least 50% of the Excellence-level criteria.</p> <p>Larger businesses must achieve 80% of the Achievement-level criteria overall and within each pillar to accredit at the Achievement level; or to reach Excellence level, they must achieve 85% of the Achievement-level criteria and 60% of the Excellence-level criteria.</p> <p>Micro-businesses are evaluated against a smaller set of criteria and only have an achievement level. For micro-businesses the four pillars are the same, including accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation. The process for accreditation is the same with an initial foundation check-list, then a full assessment. However, there are only 8 core criteria that micro-businesses need to meet to reach Achievement-level.</p> | <p>Accreditation lasts for 4 years.</p> <p>The Good Work Standard is funded from the Mayor's wider Economic Fairness Programme budget, as a part of the GLA's core Economic Development function. Employers are not charged for accreditation.</p> <p>If employers meet the minimum scoring threshold based on their self-assessment (see previous column), the Economic Fairness team will request a sample of evidence to support their responses.</p> <p>The application is then passed to a panel of Mayoral advisors and officers who evaluate and decide on accreditation.</p> <p>Trade union representatives were involved in the development of the Good Work Standard and also offer guidance and assurance around any existing or potential disputes before a specific accreditation is confirmed.</p> <p>As of May 2024, the Good Work Standard webpages on the <a href="https://www.london.gov.uk">London.gov.uk</a> website, reported that over 150 employers were recognised as being good employers and had received accreditation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>Good Employment Charter</p> <p><i>Active since 2019</i></p> | Greater Manchester CA    | <p>There are two tiers of engagement. Employers initially become Supporters and may then progress to become full Members. A third advocate tier was included in the original design of the charter but never developed as it was felt that the member tier was sufficient since members commit to continuing to improve.</p> <p>Initially employers work with the Implementation Unit to review their practices and gather evidence. There are no restrictions preventing employers from becoming a Supporter, but they must commit to work towards meeting the membership criteria. A 'membership readiness questionnaire' is used to determine how an employer currently performs in relation to the criteria underpinning the Charter.</p> <p>In order to become a member employers work with staff within the Unit to complete an assessment template and marshal the evidence that they are meeting the membership criteria. For example, when it comes to paying the Living Wage, members are expected to be committed to paying the Real Living Wage, which might be evidenced through accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation, or three months pay roll and a 'board minute' confirming the commitment. The assessment and supporting evidence are reviewed by the technical review panel who may request additional information. Once satisfied with the responses the panel can request that the Programme Board approve membership.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>The Charter Implementation Unit is responsible for engaging employers, assessing how employers measure up against the charter criteria and promoting and raising awareness of the charter.</p> <p>The Charter is currently funded on an annual basis by the GMCA through retained business rates, with earlier funding secured through allocations such as the Covid Recovery Plan. The Unit is now staffed by 8 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) staff and an apprentice.</p> <p>Employers are assessed against the good employment criteria with input from a technical review panel (four members) and the Programme Board. In 2024, membership of the Programme Board included regional representatives from ACAS, CIPD, the Chamber of Commerce, other business representatives and consultants, the TUC and individual unions, council and combined authority officers, academics, and business and employment support providers</p> <p>The combined authority has also started to integrate the charter with wider policies and frameworks. The GM Business Investment Fund provides loans and equity at commercial rates for businesses who plan to create jobs in the region. One of the criteria for businesses applying for these funds is that they will become Supporters of the Charter. The Charter has also been integrated with the GMCA's procurement processes under the social value framework. The</p> |

| Scheme                                                         | Lead / area                     | Approach and design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Governance and funding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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|                                                                |                                 | <p>Employers are assessed against seven characteristics of good employment. When it comes to determining member status, each of these characteristics is associated with more specific priorities and criteria as follows: 1) secure work (including offering employees security over their income and hours; contracts reflecting actual hours); 2) Flexible work (including designing flexible jobs and having a flexible work policy); 3) Pay (including paying the Living Wage and providing entitlement to all staff and from first day of absence); 4) Engagement and voice (including a commitment to engaging employees; involving them in decision making and monitoring of engagement); 5) Recruitment (including adopting processes to ensure recruitment of a more diverse workforce); 6) People management (including active implementation and monitoring of an equality, diversity and inclusion policy and providing development opportunities to support progression of employees); 7) Health and wellbeing (including implementing systems to promote and monitor staff wellbeing)</p> <p>The charter criteria have evolved and changed over time as new and different challenges and priorities relating to employment have been recognised e.g. emphasis on coverage of sick pay following the pandemic.</p> <p>The charter aims to build a movement of employers working together to improve their employment practices. There is no direct cost to employers from taking part. The charter team organise a range of events, awards, a podcast, site visits, and learning days – often co-hosted by other employers – to encourage employers to learn from one another and to engage with wider support. ‘Share and Learn’ cohorts of employers who are not yet members can take part in a series of workshops facilitated by the Unit.</p> | <p>principle is that by 2023 ‘all procurements over the regulated threshold (unless evidenced as legally and commercially unviable)’ will be with businesses who at point of contracting or within one year are: Supporters of the Charter, pay the Living Wage and have a credible plan to be carbon neutral by 2050.</p> <p>When it comes to checking on compliance and progress, Supporters are approached on a rolling basis to ensure that they are still committed to progressing to Member status. Employer members should be reviewed every 3 years to ensure they continue to meet the membership criteria, which might also evolve.</p> <p>As of early 2024, over 600 employers had become Supporters and a further 100 were Members. A broad range of employers were engaging with the charter across different sectors, but sectoral engagement data from 2022 indicates that there was particularly strong representation among business, financial and professional services employers, construction and property, and creative, digital and technology firms. Meanwhile there was little to no representation among retail and hospitality firms at the Supporter or Member tiers. There has since been some further progress and engagement from the health and social care, security and cleaning, construction and transport sectors.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>Fair Employment Charter</p> <p><i>Active since 2021</i></p> | <p>Liverpool City Region CA</p> | <p>It is anticipated that there will be three levels of accreditation – Aspiring, Accredited members, and Ambassador.</p> <p>Within the charter, fair employment is defined in terms of four key principles, or pillars: 1) Fair; 2) Just; 3) Inclusive; 4) Healthy.</p> <p>The Accredited Level of membership has not yet been formally launched but is currently being piloted with a small group of Aspiring Level Organisations. The Ambassador tier is not yet active. Once employers are Accredited, they will be able to promote their participation using the Charter logo.</p> <p>To reach the initial Aspiring level, employers must meet a set of criteria relating to each of the principles. These include, for each key principle: 1) Healthy: demonstrating compliance with health and safety requirements and of the importance of mental health in the workplace; and auditing homeworking and other policies; 2) Fair pay: identifying use of atypical contracts and cases where they pay below the Living Wage and planning how to address these issues; 3) Inclusive: undertaking a staff equality audit and creating a plan to introduce ACAS-recommended performance management and training policies if not already in place; 4) Just: informing staff of their right to join a trade union and offering fair access to unions, and offering work experience.</p> <p>To become Accredited members, employers will be required to meet a higher set of criteria against each of the principles. Key requirements are that employers will minimise unnecessary use of unstable and temporary contracts (excepting some ‘defined and specific circumstances’) (Healthy); pay the living wage or above to employees and work with contractors to develop a plan for them to pay</p>                                                           | <p>The charter was developed with the support of a Reference Group comprising representatives from VOLA (a consortium of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations), trade unions, the CIPD, Acas, and employers. Once the Charter had been developed, the Fair Employment Charter Review Panel was formed, with representation from ACAS, CIPD, VOLA, the Combined Authority and unions.</p> <p>The Charter is not funded by an external, or separate funding stream. The post of the Senior Fair Employment Charter Officer is paid through internal Employment and Skills Budget.</p> <p>Initially, the Review Panel will meet to review employer applications and will decide whether each employer has sufficiently demonstrated that they comply with the four pillars. If the application is accepted, it will then undergo a Due Diligence Check with the Local Authority representative within the area of the City Region where the Organisation is based. The final decision around Aspiring and Accredited member status will then be made by the Executive Director for Policy, Strategy and Governance, taking into account the feedback from Panel Members, and Due Diligence Check information.</p> <p>Employers engaging with the charter are meant to be on a journey toward improving their employment practices, progressing through the levels of the Fair Employment Charter, and continuing to demonstrate their compliance at each level. Member status can be reviewed after 2 years when employers will provide supporting evidence to demonstrate their continued compliance with each of the principles of fair employment.</p> <p>Signing businesses up to the Charter is part of the CA’s Corporate Plan (2021-2024), and the aim was to sign up at least 75 organisations by 2024. As of April</p> |

| Scheme                                                                                                                                              | Lead / area                                    | Approach and design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Governance and funding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                | <p>the living wage as well (Fair pay); provide evidence of actions taken to improve equality, diversity and inclusion (Inclusive); and engage with trade unions representing their staff and requests for union recognition.</p> <p>To reach Accredited level, employers will be asked to provide case study information and to demonstrate what impact their policies and procedures relating to each of the 4 pillars of Fair Employment have had on their organisations, their employees, and their customers.</p> <p>The initiative is open to all employers who operate in the Liverpool City Region.</p> <p>The Fair Employment Charter team organises events for employers in line with the four pillars of the Charter and shares information about other relevant themed events directly with Aspiring level employers.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>2024, 124 organisations were formally approved as Aspiring Level Organisations. Employers from a range of sectors had reached aspiring level, including some individual councils, the combined authority, management consultancy firms, charities, local football clubs, creative, tech and professional services firms, construction companies, care organisations, and a co-operative bakery.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p>Good Work Pledge</p> <p><i>Active since 2020, under review following May 2024 when NTCA became part of the North East Combined Authority</i></p> | <p>North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA)</p> | <p>There are two levels of membership – Standard and Advanced level.</p> <p>The Pledge promotes five key pillars of good work, with 4-5 criteria associated with each of these. These were identified with reference to the design of other charters and input from key stakeholders (employers, employees and others). The pillars are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Valuing and rewarding your workforce: including paying a Living Wage to employees and in their supply chains; providing job security</li> <li>(2) Promoting health and wellbeing: including providing health and safety training and representation; and effective practices in supporting people with health conditions and disabilities within the organisation</li> <li>(3) Effective communications and representation: including valuing and listening to employees, ensuring employees have autonomy and voice in the running of the business; and promoting fairness and trust at all levels of the organisation</li> <li>(4) Developing a balanced workforce: including providing highly quality apprenticeships in priority sectors and offering work experience; ensuring low-skilled workers have opportunities to progress; promoting inclusiveness, health and wellbeing, equality and diversity and workforce development.</li> <li>(5) Social responsibility: including demonstrating social responsibility through effective procurement and contracting, buying locally and paying suppliers on time; and a clear commitment to sustainability</li> </ol> <p>Prospective employers register and apply online. To achieve Standard level, employers must demonstrate compliance or active progress toward complying with two of the pillars. For the Advanced award, employers must demonstrate compliance with all five pillars. Specifically, Advanced level accreditation requires that employers pay or commit to actively work towards paying the Living Wage to all workers. During the application, employers are asked to provide information and evidence including case studies to show how they meet the criteria.</p> <p>Employers can join the pledge if they are registered and operate elsewhere, but under the NTCA phase of the Pledge their application had to reflect working practices within the (then) NTCA geography and significant operations. Holders of the pledge will gain access to the Good Work Pledge community of employers, which is due to launch in Autumn 2024.</p> | <p>The North of Tyne Good Work Pledge was developed with the support of an advisory group, who helped to shape the charter's framework and principles. It was implemented under the leadership of Jamie Driscoll, then mayor of the North of Tyne Combined Authority. The NTCA became part of the North East Combined Authority in May 2024.</p> <p>The Pledge was and continues to be funded by the North of Tyne Investment Fund (now NECA), with current funding for 5 years.</p> <p>Applications for the Pledge are initially reviewed internally by a virtual team of assessors, trained staff from within the Combined Authority. The main assessor evaluates the information in the online application against the criteria for each of the pillars. If there are gaps in the application or clarification is needed, the application will be returned to the employer, so they have an opportunity to address these. A second assessor also reviews the application for fairness and consistency. Contentious or borderline applications also involve input from senior management. A complaints and feedback policy is also being introduced.</p> <p>Organisations that contracted with the NTCA were required to join the Pledge at least at Standard level within 6 months.</p> <p>The first award period is for 2 years, and employers are then expected to engage in a review process, reporting on any changes or new practices. They can either re-accredit at their current level if they continue to meet the criteria, or upgrade to the Advanced level of the pledge. Should an employer fail to update their information, their award can be taken away.</p> <p>The goal is to reach 900 accredited employers by 2027, including 200 SMEs. According to the Pledge website, in early 2024 167 businesses were accredited.</p> |

| Scheme                                                  | Lead / area        | Approach and design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     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| <p>Good Employment Charter</p> <p>Active since 2022</p> | West of England CA | <p>The Good Employment Charters offers two tiers of association. Employers can join as Supporters and progress to Member status. In order to become full members, they must meet the criteria associated with all seven characteristics of good employment but there is flexibility around how employers can demonstrate that they meet these criteria.</p> <p>The Charter asks employers to work towards (for Supporters) or demonstrate that they are meeting (for Members) a set of criteria associated with seven principles of good employment (some of the criteria are described below):</p> <p>(1) Secure work: including criteria associated with the Living Wage Foundation's 'Living Hours' component, such as having contracts that reflect actual hours worked, guaranteed minimum hours, and equal pay and conditions for agency workers after 12 weeks;</p> <p>(2) Flexible work: including designing flexible jobs and advertising the option of flexibility from the outset; offering flexibility around location of work/home workers and hours of work and working patterns;</p> <p>(3) Real living wage: accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation or being able to demonstrate payment of the Real Living Wage and having a plan in place to pay contractors the Real Living Wage;</p> <p>(4) Engagement and voice: including involving employees in decision making and change management; engaging positively with trade unions; and having a sustainability representative or working group (for businesses with over 50 employees)</p> <p>(5) Recruitment: including anonymised recruitment processes and selection processes that are designed to eliminate bias; training recruitment managers in equality, diversity and inclusivity; engaging, where possible, with regional and local employment and skills programmes to enable access to employment opportunities for residents who may be distant from the labour market;</p> <p>(6) Developing people: including an organisation development/training plan covering all staff; manager role profiles that include time to manage the workforce; introducing grievance and disciplinary processes in line with ACAS processes</p> <p>(7) Health and wellbeing: including making adjustments for people with long-term conditions and disabilities; offering access to the Cycle to Work scheme, or similar; minimising animal cruelty in working practices and where possible having a 'pet friendly' workplace policy; and (for businesses with over 50 employees) appointing a Wellbeing Champion and Mental Health First Aid(ers).</p> <p>In order to become a Supporter, employers submit an Action Plan evidencing current practice and the changes they will make over the coming 12 months. The plan is reviewed by the Charter team and once employers are approved as Supporters they have access to toolkits, materials, and networking opportunities to aid in implementing changes. Employers are able to progress to Member status once they submit an application demonstrating how they are meeting the criteria associated with each of the characteristics of good employment. Applications are reviewed by the technical review panel.</p> <p>Monthly networking events are organised on a range of themes, including diversity, mental health, sustainability, and workplace skills. Employers can also access business support via the Combined Authority's Growth Hub, which provides tailored advice to SMEs and other resources.</p> | <p>The Charter was launched in 2022 having featured among the manifesto commitments of the prospective metro mayor Dan Norris, who was elected in 2021. A steering group oversaw the initial development of the Charter and ongoing support is provided by partner organisations, who include the chamber of commerce, FSB, trade unions, ACAS, and the TUC.</p> <p>The Charter is implemented by an internal team and overseen by a strategic lead within the Combined Authority. The team comprises around 3 FTE staff members. The Technical Review Panel is responsible for assessing applications and includes representatives from Acas South West, Business in the Community, Business West, and a HR advisor from the Combined Authority.</p> <p>Membership is reviewed on a two year basis to ensure that employers continue to meet the criteria. If concerns arise around continued compliance, or in relation to other issues, a process is in place to address concerns. Employers can move between the levels of the Charter (i.e. Supporter to Member, and the reverse)</p> <p>The Charter is free to businesses and is funded from the West of England Combined Authority Investment Fund, within the marketing budget. The Charter is not currently formally linked to the Combined Authority's procurement and commissioning practices.</p> <p>In early 2024 172 employers were Supporters of the Charter and 5 employers had progressed to Member status. The current focus is on scaling up and expanding the reach of the Charter, with a plan to increase Supporter numbers and continue to engage a broad cross-section of the regional business community. With Members, the aim is to engage 5-6 employers as Members per quarter, increasing to 10 per quarter as the initiative continues to rollout. The working assumption is that around 1 in 10 employers will progress to Member status from Supporter.</p> |



| Scheme                                            | Lead / area              | Approach and design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Governance and funding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <p>Fair Work Charter</p> <p>Active since 2023</p> | <p>West Yorkshire CA</p> | <p>There is only one level of membership.</p> <p>In order to become members businesses are asked to assess their own practices in relation to five 'pillars' of fair work. These are: opportunity; security; wellbeing; employee voice; fulfilment</p> <p>Each of the five pillars cover 2-3 sub-themes. (1) Opportunity (inclusive pathways into employment and career progression; inclusive recruitment practices; flexible working arrangements) (2) Security (fair pay and working hours; secure contracts and conditions; safe working environments) (3) Wellbeing (fostering good physical and mental health; support for wider aspects of wellbeing) (4) Employee voice (consultation and engagement; recognition and support for trade unions, where requested by workers) (4) Fulfilment (learning and development; people management; supporting communities and good causes)</p> <p>There is an emphasis on flexibility in the design of the Charter with the aim of enabling the engagement of small businesses as potential charter employers. The majority of businesses within West Yorkshire are micro-businesses</p> <p>All the criteria are treated equally, there are no core requirements e.g. that the business is paying its employees the living wage. But employers must meet at least one of the criteria that are set out for each of the five pillars and there is an expectation that they will continue to make progress in other areas whilst they are members of the Charter</p> <p>Employer self-assessments are completed online and the responses are then reviewed by the commissioned delivery partner. The delivery partner also uses the assessment information to identify areas requiring work in future and will use the data to benchmark progress after 4-6 months.</p> <p>Members receive a certificate and badge and are encouraged to access additional resources relating to each of the pillars of fair work through a portal which includes 10, 1 hour videos, Q&amp;A and workbooks relating to each of the pillars.</p> <p>The aim is to use the charter to build a network of employers who can share good practice. This will be supported through a series of peer to peer networks that will be set up by Greenborough but run by the members.</p> | <p>The charter was formally launched by the Mayor in November 2023, with 47 businesses announced as early adopters of the Charter.</p> <p>For the initial implementation phase, the Combined Authority (CA) have commissioned a delivery partner to support with implementation of the Charter. Greenborough, a business support organisation, is the delivery partner (currently in place until December 2024). The CA have also tendered for a company to provide marketing support</p> <p>A pilot project has also been established with the TUC Yorkshire and Humber which involves the creation of a Fair Work Project Officer. This will be offered as a secondment opportunity from the Combined Authority (i.e. its constituent local authorities) to the TUC. Recruitment to the role was underway in April 2024 and the pilot is due to run until the end of 2024. It is expected that the officer will work to engage both workers and employers, organise training and also work with employers to develop fair work plans that will attempt to address employer-specific challenges and opportunities.</p> <p>Up to £600k has been set aside to support the development of the charter over the first 3 years (2021-2024) with a review taking place at the end of 2024. The current funding derives from the Gainshare funding that was awarded to the CA as a part of the devolution agreement</p> <p>A steering group supported the initial development of the Charter and a new group, including many of the original members, has been formed to support the implementation of the Charter. Their role is to provide governance and strategic oversight around the implementation of the Fair Work Charter and the associated TUC pilot project.</p> <p>The ambition for the first year of implementation is that the delivery partner will work to sign up at least 150 businesses across the public and private sectors, voluntary, community and social enterprises, medium and micro businesses. They are also looking for a mix in terms of the equality, diversity and inclusion characteristics of business, based on the characteristics of the employer representatives who complete the self-assessment form</p> <p>In terms of follow up, the current plan is that the delivery partner will contact businesses after 4-6 months to assess whether progress has been made against the Charter and to encourage businesses to continue to make changes.</p> |