



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Decent Work
and Productivity
Research Centre

The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter

Evaluation

**Interim Report
Stage One**

May 2021

THE REPORT HAS BEEN PREPARED BY RESEARCHERS AT THE DECENT WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY RESEARCH CENTRE AT MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY:

PROFESSOR BEN LUPTON, DR SARAH CROZIER, DR CECILIA ELLIS, DR YANQING LAI AND DR FAVOUR ORJI, WITH THANKS ALSO TO PROFESSOR ASHWIN KUMAR AT THE UNIVERSITY'S POLICY EVALUATION RESEARCH UNIT.

Executive Summary

This interim report presents the results of the first stage of the evaluation of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter. The Charter was proposed in Andy Burnham's manifesto for the 2017 Greater Manchester mayoral election and following a period of consultation with stakeholders was agreed by the Combined Authority in spring 2019 and launched in January 2020. It has engaged over 200 employers and covers more than 200,000 employees.

A survey of organisations' Charter Leads (59 respondents) was conducted along with interviews with seven Charter Leads/HR Managers in Charter organisations, and interviews with three stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the Charter. The aim was to understand the motivations, engagement and experiences of Charter organisations and its perceived impact, along with a range of stakeholder views on the development and progress of the Charter. The experiences of managers and employees in Charter organisations will be captured in stage two of the evaluation. As the evaluation has only completed its first stage, and sample sizes are relatively small, the findings need to be approached with a degree of care. Also, the Charter has been in operation for just over a year, so there are limits to the levels of change that could be reasonably be expected. In addition, the research was conducted against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is likely to have affected organisations' experiences.

The main findings from the organisation survey and interviews were as follows:

- The desire to support a specifically ‘Greater Manchester’ initiative was the most commonly reported reason for engaging with the Charter. Reputational considerations, and recognition of existing employment practice, were the other most frequently quoted reasons. However, the desire to make improvements to employment practice was also a driver for a majority of organisations
- The processes for joining and progressing within the Charter were seen as straightforward and supportive by the majority of Charter organisations
- The Charter’s ‘Characteristics of Good Employment’ were generally perceived as an appropriate and sufficiently flexible challenge for organisations to demonstrate, though a minority of organisations found individual characteristics particularly challenging. There were some changes suggested by respondents to the coverage and content of the Charter characteristics
- Engagement with the Charter’s support network and activities was variable, though the webinars were well attended, but where organisations did engage they found that to be a useful experience
- Although many organisations reported that their anticipated engagement with the Charter had been reduced by the effects of the pandemic, a number of respondents referred to valuable support from the Charter on managing its employment impacts
- Levels of awareness of the Charter among managers and employees within organisations was not reported to be high, and there was also a view expressed that publicity of the benefits of Charter membership could be extended
- A majority of organisations (53%) reported at least one improvement in employment practice that they attributed to engagement with the Charter. In respect of each of the Charter’s characteristics of good employment a sizable minority of organisations reported an improvement. A majority of organisations anticipated future improvements.

- A range of wider organisational benefits related to Charter engagement were also reported by a sizable minority of respondents, and a majority felt that the general reputation of their organisation had been enhanced

The main findings from the interview with stakeholders were as follows:

- It was a strength of the Charter that it had engaged a range of stakeholders in its design and inception
- Stakeholders had different perspectives, but it was felt that on balance these had been accommodated fairly in the design that had emerged
- In particular, a tension in Charter design between its ‘engagement’ and ‘accreditation’ function had resulted in an acceptable and workable accommodation, with the inclusion of the Supporter tier playing an important role
- The Charter was perceived to have been successful in engaging a wide range of organisations with its agenda and activities
- There was a need to regularly review the Charter’s design and operation in the light of changing circumstances, not least the anticipated economic challenges post-pandemic

Overall, the report concludes that Greater Manchester has succeeded in developing a functioning good employment Charter, which strikes a balance between different objectives, and has taken account of the views of range of different stakeholders. There are areas where refinements will need to be considered, and the second stage of the evaluation will give a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses a year further on. However, the Charter has been successful in engaging a good number of organisations and there are emerging early signs of some positive impacts on employment practice and wider organisational benefits.

As this is an interim report, we do not make formal recommendations. However, at the end of the report we identify potential next steps around the development and implementation of the Charter and its continuing evaluation.

Table of Contents	Page
1. Introduction	5
1.1. The Charter	5
1.2. The Evaluation	6
1.3. Evaluation Methods	6
1.3.1. Survey of Charter Leads	6
1.3.2. Focus Groups and Interviews with Charter Leads	7
1.3.3. Interviews with Charter Stakeholders	8
1.3.4. Research Ethics	8
1.3.5. Limitations	8
2. Findings	9
2.1. Charter Leads' Survey and Interview Findings	9
2.1.1. Characteristics of the Survey Sample	9
2.1.2. Reasons for Becoming a Charter Member or Supporter	9
2.1.3. Experience of Becoming a Charter Member or Supporter	12
2.1.4. The Charter's Characteristics of Good Employment	12
2.1.5. Engagement with the Charter Network	17
2.1.6. The Impact of the Charter	21
2.1.7. Summary of Charter Lead's Survey and Interview Findings	25
2.2. Stakeholder Perspectives	26
2.2.1. The Inception and Development of the Charter	27
2.2.2. The Structure and Content of the Charter	28
2.2.3. Interest, Awareness and Support	31
2.2.4. Improvements and Impact	32
2.2.5. The Future of the Charter	32
3. Conclusions	34
4. Next Steps	36

List of Figures and Appendices	Page
Figure 1: Reasons for Joining the Charter	10
Figure 2: Views of the Charter Characteristics Taken as a Whole	13
Figure 3: Level of Challenge Presented by Each Charter Characteristic	14
Figure 4: Perceptions of the Need for Change in the Charter Characteristics	15
Figure 5: Organisations' Engagement with the Charter Network and Activities	17
Figure 6: The Perceived Value of Charter Activities, Networks and Resources	18
Figure 7: Perceptions of Manager and Employee Awareness of the Charter	20
Figure 8: Perceived Improvements in Management Practices Arising from the Charter	22
Figure 9: Perceived Impact on Organisations of Charter Involvement	24
Figure 10: Anticipated Improvements in Employment Practice as a Result of the Charter	25

1. Introduction

This interim report provides an analysis of the first stage of the evaluation of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter (henceforth, “the Charter”). Following a brief introduction to the Charter, and a discussion of the evaluation programme and its methods, we present the findings from the various strands of the research. We draw conclusions and identify next steps, both issues for the Charter leadership to consider and issues for the second stage of the evaluation to address.

1.1 The Charter

The development of a Good Employment Charter for Greater Manchester was first proposed in Andy Burnham's manifesto for the 2017 Greater Manchester mayoral election. Following the election, the Combined Authority chose to include the concept of a Charter within the Greater Manchester Strategy Implementation Plan to help deliver the priorities of ‘good jobs with opportunities for people to progress and develop’ and ‘a thriving and productive economy in all parts of Greater Manchester’.

Leaders saw the importance of involving a variety of different stakeholders in the Charter and so a process of co-design was undertaken, involving employers, business groups, trades unions, professional bodies, campaign groups, and academics to understand their aspirations and to create a consensus around the contents of the Charter and its definition of good employment across the city region.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority led a two-part consultation process which began in March 2018 with an Evidence and Consultation Paper. This set out the academic literature on how better employee engagement can lead to higher productivity and better services, summarised existing Charters across GM and the rest of the country and asked for views on what a Charter should contain. Over 120 responses were received from across the public and private sectors, which were fed into the draft design of the Charter. A proposition was then developed for how it should work, and the seven characteristics of good employment were outlined, with a tiered structure for supporters and members and assistance available for employers to help them progress to higher standards. A second consultation was then published in October 2018 to elicit views on the Charter's characteristics and effective implementation. Following these two consultations, the final design of the Charter was agreed and signed off by the Combined Authority in Spring 2019, with resource allocated to the foundation of a Charter Unit sitting within the Growth Company, a partner organisation of the Combined Authority, to run the quotidian operation of the Charter. The supporters' network was established in July of the same year and

the full Charter was launched by the Unit in January 2020 with the publication of the membership criteria and the announcement of the first six members. The Charter has now been operational for over a year and has engaged over 200 employers across the city region, covering over 200,000 employees.

1.2 The Evaluation

Researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University were engaged to provide an evaluation of the initial impact of the Charter. Following consultation with representatives of GMCA an evaluation plan was agreed, involving a baseline survey of all employees in Charter organisations, and separately of representatives of each Charter organisation, to be repeated a year later. The objective was to track the impact of the Charter on employment standards and experiences. As preparations were being made to launch these surveys, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. It was agreed with GMCA representatives that conducting a meaningful employee survey during the pandemic would be problematic, partly because people's experience of work (if indeed they were still employed and working) would be atypical, and partly because tracking changes in employment related to the Charter would be challenging given that these were likely to 'drowned out' by changes arising from the pandemic. As a result, a new two-stage evaluation plan was agreed with the following objectives.

1. To understand the motivations and engagement of Charter organisations (Members and Supporters)
2. To assess the experience and impact of the Charter as reported by Charter organisations
3. To understand the level of engagement of line managers in Charter organisations and the perceived impact on their practice
4. To understand the experience of impact of the Charter as perceived by employees in Charter organisations
5. To surface the reflections of Charter stakeholders on the development and impact of the Charter

It was decided to focus on objectives 1, 2, and 5 for the first stage of the evaluation, with additional evaluation activities between April and December 2021 capturing further data relating to these objectives and incorporating the employee perspective – objective 4. The design for the second stage will be finalised with GMCA following the publication of this report.

1.3 Evaluation Methods

A mixed-method approach of surveys, interviews and focus groups was adopted.

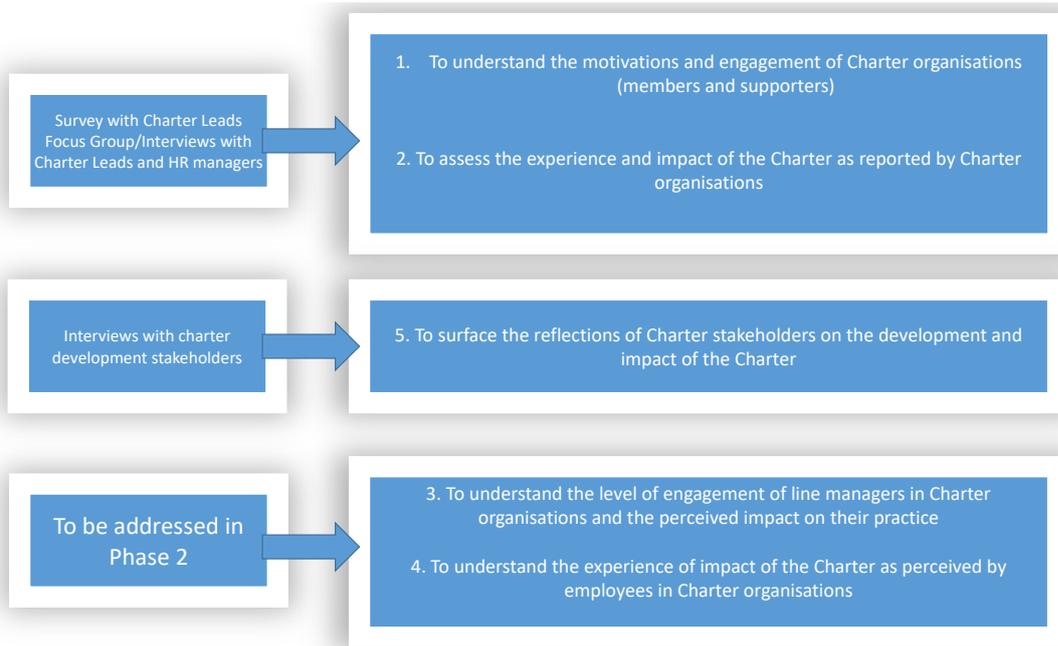
- To address objectives 1 and 2, around organisations' experience of the Charter, a questionnaire was sent to the 'Charter Lead' in each organisation.
- To develop deeper understanding of issues relating to these objectives, this was supplemented with two focus groups and one interview with Charter Leads and HR Managers, involving a total of seven participants representing five different Charter organisations.
- To address objective 5, interviews were conducted with three stakeholders in the development of the Charter.
- Objectives 3 and 4, the line manager and employee objectives will be addressed in stage 2 of the evaluation.

1.3.1 The Survey of Charter Leads

A questionnaire was designed to elicit organisations' experience of engaging with the Charter. Questions were designed under five headings:

- Organisations' motivations for engaging with the Charter
- The nature and extent of their engagement with the Charter network
- Their perception of the Charter characteristics and the challenge set in meeting them
- The perceived impact of their engagement with the Charter on employment practice
- The perceived impact of their engagement with the Charter on the organisation and its stakeholders

The following diagram illustrates the mapping of research activities to the project objectives:



In addition, a number of demographic questions were asked to collect data on (for example) organisational size, sector, location with a view to exploring whether experience of the Charter varied in respect of organisation characteristics.

For ease of completion and data collection, questions were designed primarily with ‘tick box’ or Likert-scale responses (strongly agree, agree etc), though where it was anticipated that further information or clarification would be useful, respondents were invited to record additional information or observations in a ‘free-text’ box. The questionnaire was uploaded to an online survey platform and piloted with a range of stakeholders (Charter leads and other stakeholders) to check for ease of completion and question clarity and relevance.

The questionnaire was issued via email by the researchers in February 2021 to the Charter Lead in each of the registered Charter ‘Members’ (22), ‘Supporters’ (88) and ‘Actively Engaged’ organisations (14) using a list provided by the Charter Implementation Unit. A total of 124 questionnaires were issued. In order to encourage participants to respond openly, respondents were not required to provide their name or that of their organisation. Fifty-nine questionnaires were returned - a response rate of 48% - a strong response for surveys of this type.

The sample size means that it is not possible to conduct robust statistical significance of differences and relationships in the data, but does allow us identify important and interesting trends

1.3.2 Focus Groups and Interviews with Charter Leads

Two focus groups and one individual interview were conducted with Charter Leads/HR Managers in December 2021 and February 2022. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore in greater depth organisations’ motivations for engaging with the Charter, their experience of doing so and the impact that it had had on employment and the organisation. The Charter unit provided a list of organisations that they felt might be willing to be take part in a focus group. These were contacted, and seven participants from five different organisations agreed to take part. To encourage openness, participants were informed that their names and that of their organisation would not be disclosed in the reporting of findings. A set of discussion questions were prepared by the researcher around the key objectives of the evaluation. Discussion was then facilitated and guided by the researcher to ensure a range of contributions and a broad,

1.3.3 Interviews with Charter Stakeholders

It was agreed with GMCA that the evaluation would be enriched by including the views of some key stakeholders involved in the development and progress of the Charter. Interviews were conducted with Ian MacArthur, Head of the Charter Implementation Unit, and two other members of the Charter Board who together would reflect some of the different stakeholder interests. Accordingly, Clive Memmott, Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Peter Urwin, Organiser, Unison, were approached and subsequently interviewed. It is anticipated that we will be able to include other stakeholder 'voices' in Stage 2 of the evaluation. All three agreed to be interviewed 'on the record'. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit perspectives on the rationale, design and development of Charter, its progress and impact, and possible areas of future development. Interviews lasted around an hour and were recorded and later transcribed. Both the Charter Lead and Stakeholder data were analysed thematically.

1.3.4 Research Ethics

All interviews, and the survey, were conducted in accordance with Manchester Metropolitan University's research ethics standards, and approved by the University's research ethics committee. Participants were provided with information in order to be able to provide informed consent to participate, and (where applicable) given assurances around confidentiality and anonymity.

1.3.5 Limitations

This is the first stage of the evaluation, and there are some limits as to what can be deduced from the findings arising from the character and size of the samples. As a result, the conclusions need to be treated with caution, and corroboration is likely to be required from other data sources, and particularly from the second stage of the evaluation. It is envisaged that in stage two, there

will be an opportunity to conduct a large-scale survey of employees, as well as sourcing further data from Charter organisations and stakeholders. A larger-scale survey will offer opportunity for statistical modelling of relationships, but the descriptive data that we present in the report will nonetheless provide a valuable picture, and useful indicators for patterns that could be explored further.

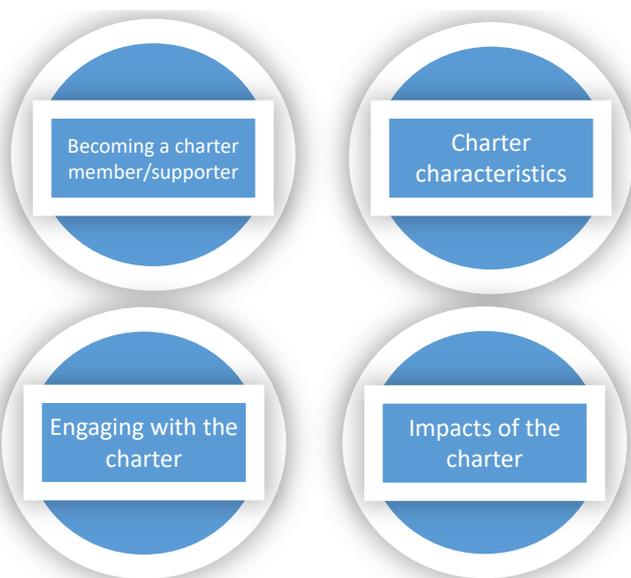
It is also important to note that we only report the views of those who have chosen to engage with the Charter, and cannot shed light on the perspectives of those organisations who have not engaged. We cannot, for example, answer directly the question as to why some organisations chose not to join the Charter.

The effects of the pandemic, which have been experienced during the period of the evaluation, also make it difficult to disentangle the effects of the Charter from other effects on employment practice. The second stage of the evaluation activity will be able to address the first of these issues, and provide a more complete picture, and it is hoped (for evaluation, and other more important reasons!) that during the second period of data collection a more 'normal' business environment will pertain – though undoubtedly the effects of the pandemic will still be felt.

2. Findings

The findings will be presented as follows. After some comments on the characteristics of the sample, we present the survey results integrated with commentary from the Charter Lead Interviews and 'free-text' comments from the survey. We structure participant reflections around four themes:

The extracts from the interviews are presented in quotation marks and italicised, with an (anonymized) indication as to the source of the quotation. Survey 'free-text' responses are not italicised, attributed or placed in quotation marks. At the end of the section, we present an analysis of the Stakeholder interviews. Illustrative quotations here are fully attributed with the agreement of the participants.



2.1 Charter Leads' Survey and Interview Findings

2.1.1 Characteristics of the Survey Sample

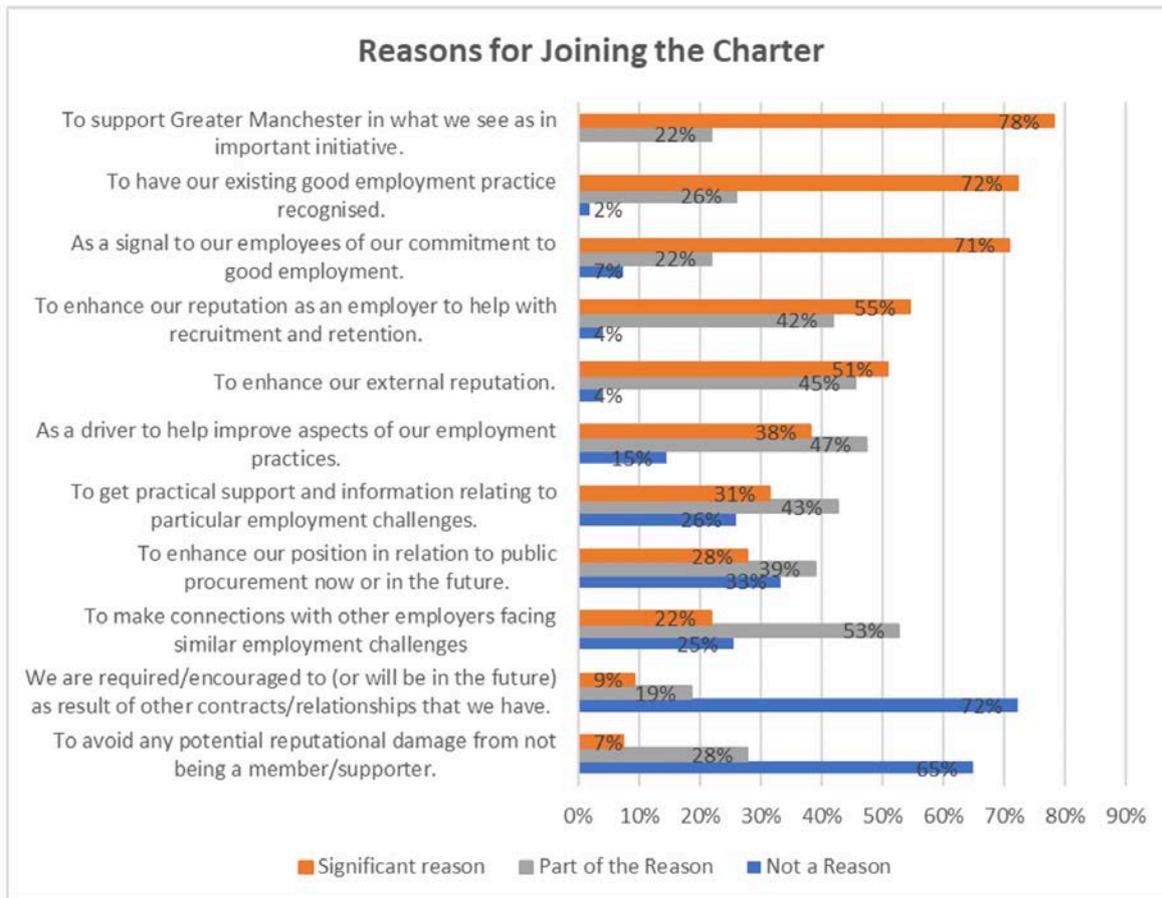
Of the respondents 34% were Charter Members, 56% were Charter Supporters and 10% described themselves as 'Other'. Charter Members were more likely to complete the survey than those in other categories. The responses came from a broad range of organisations. For example, 42% came from the private sector, and 28% each from the public and voluntary sectors (2% from 'others'). Sixty-two percent of responses were from SMEs, more than half of those from organisations with fewer than 50 employees. At the other end of the scale 28% of responses were from organisations with more than 1000 employees.

Eighty percent of organisations were headquartered in Greater Manchester, the majority of which also employed people outside Greater Manchester. Half of organisations had their largest workplace in the Manchester City Council area. However, the response included organisations based, or employing people, in each of the other Greater Manchester boroughs.

2.1.2 Reasons for Becoming a Charter Supporter or Member

We asked respondents to indicate the reasons why they became a Charter Supporter or Member. They were asked to choose from a list of possible reasons and indicate whether these were a significant reason for joining, part of the reason for joining, or not a reason at all. They were also invited to record other reasons that they may have had. Figure 1 shows the responses that were identified as being either significant or partial reasons for joining with the Charter.

Figure 1: Reasons for Joining the Charter



Clearly, respondents found many good reasons to become Charter Members or Supporters. Supporting a specifically Greater Manchester initiative was the most commonly-cited reason overall, with a range of recognition and reputational reasons also frequently registered.

Interview respondents often stressed the importance to them that this was a local or regional Charter, with strong local political backing,

“It’s also local, you know there’s that regional element to this and that local recognition, if we were able to achieve it... and feeling that it is touchable who you are dealing with rather than a big national thing.” (Charter Lead 2, Education)

“One of the reasons that they [board members] were keen was the fact that the Mayor was promoting it, the leader of the Council.... I don’t think that there would have been as much buy in if I wasn’t able to say, ‘ah well these people are backing this.’” (CL3, Private Sector)

Recognition of existing practice, and reputational gain as a result, were also strong drivers for the interview respondents,

“We are the first employer in [our borough] to get it [Charter membership], which we were absolutely delighted about, and I just think it sets a great example across both the borough and Greater Manchester about what can be achieved.” (CL2, Education)

“When something like the Charter comes along, it’s fantastic because it’s that external recognition for a lot of the things we are already doing.” (CL2, Education)

However, it was clear that recognition and reputation were not the only drivers. Setting an example and showcasing good practice was important, as indicated in the quote above and in this one...

“We felt like we had kind of like a role to model to the rest of the ... sector around ...what good employment looked like.” (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

..and there was a strong sense among respondents that recognition for its own sake was not the key motivation,

“Because there’s no point in getting a badge if it’s just for the good of thinking, ‘oh well that would look nice on the ... wall’, if it is not going to really have the impact amongst your staff.” (CL2, Education)

Practical reasons, such as the Charter being a driver to improve aspects of employment practice, to receive practical employment support, and to connect with other organisations, were all cited by the majority of survey respondents as reasons for joining the Charter, but were less likely to be cited as significant reasons than the ‘reputational’ and ‘signaling’ reasons. The importance of the Charter as a stimulus to reflect on and develop practice came across strongly in the interview responses,

“And it [joining the Charter] was also about learning and kind of looking at our practice and how we could build on what we are already doing.” (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

“they [organisations] have never taken a step back to think, well actually we’ve got some really good practice around that And may not have had the option to take the time out to scrutinise that in any level of detail...” (CL2, Education)

...and the following survey comment,

I was surprised how far ahead of many employers our organisation is.... I believe other less progressive businesses should have been able to learn a great deal through the Charter, and I therefore see it as very much a ‘force for good’.

Alignment with organisational values and employment agendas was also a driver mentioned by interview respondents,

“[We are] developing an employee engagement strategy and employee voice, and when the Charter was launched, you know we very quickly recognized that would align with our people strategy.” (CL2, Education)

“We became a supporter of the Charter right at the beginning.. because it did kind of align with our values.” (CL4 Third Sector, SME)

The responses suggest some differences between Members and Supporters in relation to their reasons for joining the Charter. We report these here, but as noted earlier we are not able to test these, and other differences that we report, for statistical significance, so results should be treated with caution and would need corroboration from further data collection. Patterns in the data suggest that Supporters tended to be more ‘instrumental’ than Members in their reasons for joining the Charter, for example more like to say to cite ‘external reputation’, ‘reputation with potential recruits, and ‘position regarding public procurement’ as significant reasons for joining, and ‘avoiding reputational damage’ as a reason generally. By contrast, Members were more like to stress reasons such as ‘driver to improve employment practice’ or ‘supporting GM in an important initiative’.

There were some other indicative patterns. Public sector organisations appeared less driven by external reputational or procurement issues than those in the private sector, but were more interested in having existing good practice recognized. In terms of size, medium-sized organisations differed from their smaller or larger cousins in being less driven by reputational matters – they were less likely than larger organisations to have joined to avoid reputational damage from not doing so, and patterns in the data suggest that they might be more driven by the practical benefits of the Charter for example in terms of improving practice or networking. Medium-sized organisations were more likely than large organisations to be driven by the desire to make connections with companies facing similar employment challenges.

The survey asked whether there were any factors that made organisations question whether to become a Supporter/Member of the Charter. Some respondents mentioned the challenge of particular Charter characteristics here, and we report on that below. Other concerns were around the time commitments required, though they were often accompanied by comments that these had receded over time.

2.1.3 Experience of Becoming a Charter Member/Supporter

We were also interested to find out how demanding organisations perceived it to be to become a become a Supporter of the Charter, and (where applicable) to move from being a Supporter to a Member. Overwhelmingly, organisations felt that becoming a Supporter was straightforward – 81% reported that it was either ‘not very demanding’ or ‘not at all demanding’. The survey invited respondents to comment on the process of becoming a Charter Supporter. These comments were generally favourable, citing the ease of the process and the opportunity for discussion, though a small minority of respondents referenced some communication difficulties and some ambiguity and lack of transparency around the Member/Supporter distinction.

A slightly lower proportion - 64% - of Charter members reported that the process of becoming a member had been ‘not very demanding’ or ‘not at all demanding’. Again, the majority of survey comments referenced the ease of the process and the support available, though also its (appropriately, in their view) rigorous and challenging nature. One survey respondent identified some additional benefits of going through the process,

It was an interesting process that highlighted some positive things we do as an employer, which we perhaps take for granted but is also makes us think about other things and how we could do better.

Again, there were a minority of respondents who felt that the process lacked clarity about what was expected of organisations, and that it was overly onerous, with a requirement to provide the same information on more than one occasion.

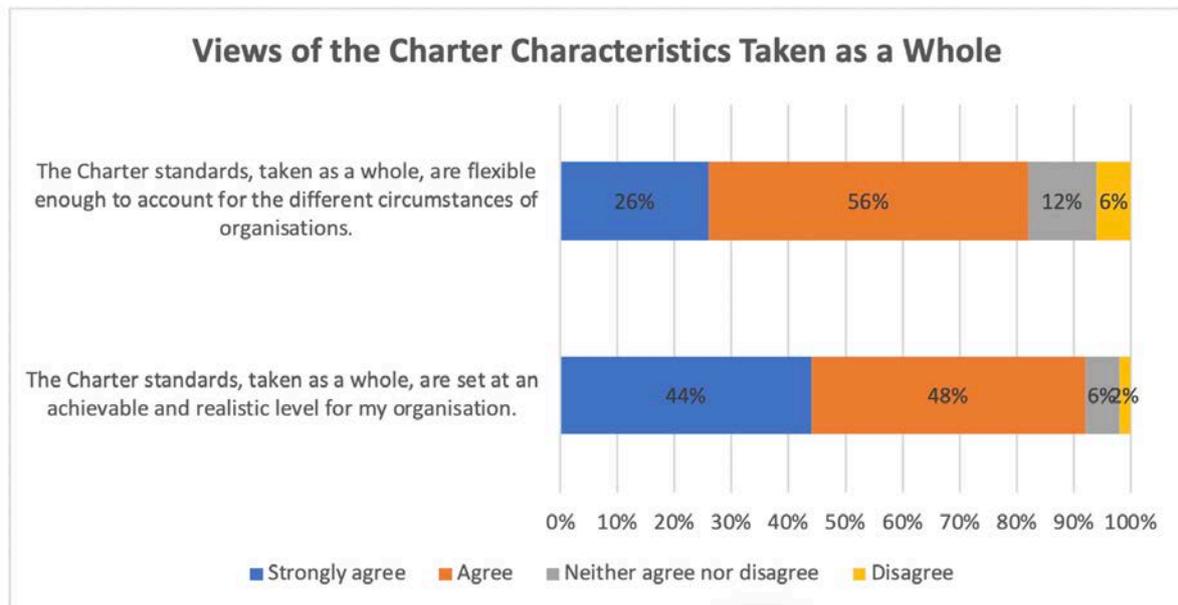
In summary, organisations reported a range of reasons for engaging with the Charter. The desire to support a specifically Greater Manchester initiative was a reason reported by all respondents, and reputational and recognition issues were generally important drivers, but many respondents also saw the Charter as means to drive improvements in employment practice. In general, the processes of becoming a Supporter, or progressing to Membership, were generally seen as straightforward to navigate, though some respondents reported concerns.

2.1.4 The Charter’s Characteristics of ‘Good Employment’

In this section we explore the views of Charter organisations on the Charter’s seven characteristics of good employment (the ‘Characteristics’) and the challenge they set for them, individually and taken as a whole.

The Charter Characteristics in General

As Figure 2 shows, overall, a clear majority of respondents felt that the characteristics, taken as a whole, represented an appropriate and sufficiently flexible challenge for organisations.

Figure 2: Views of the Charter Characteristics Taken as a Whole

Ninety-two percent of respondents reported the characteristics set an 'achievable and realistic' challenge for them. The data suggest that endorsement of this view is strongest amongst Charter Members and private sector organisations. Eighty-two percent of organisations felt that the characteristics were, 'flexible enough to account for the different circumstances of organisations' – Supporters and public sector organisations were less likely to agree with this. It is interesting that larger organisations (over 250 employees) were less likely to strongly endorse this. The perceived flexibility and achievability of the characteristics as a whole was reflected in this comment from an interviewee,

"I think it seems to do a good job ofmaking it doable for small organisations. 'Cos it think that's been a huge issue in the past in terms of the resources that small organisations have to spend trying achieve membership of stuff." (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

Though a contrary view was expressed in the following survey comments,

As a general comment, I think the standards would benefit from more consideration of the position of SMEs and private sector businesses - there is a slightly large employer/public sector feel to it.

I think it is a brilliant scheme with the power to do so much good. I just think you need to be careful that you don't demoralise companies who don't have the same resources at their disposal as the bigger companies. A small employer network within the Charter might be useful.

Another interview respondent felt that the characteristics were often seen as a requirement rather than a journey, which may reduce engagement,

"And I think also, there's an air I think of new members, if you're not doing all of the things in the Charter, then you like don't join. And I think that's perhaps a bit off putting for people. Because I'd like to see more members, like to see just a commitment to improve, because that is really strong." (CL1, Private Sector, SME)

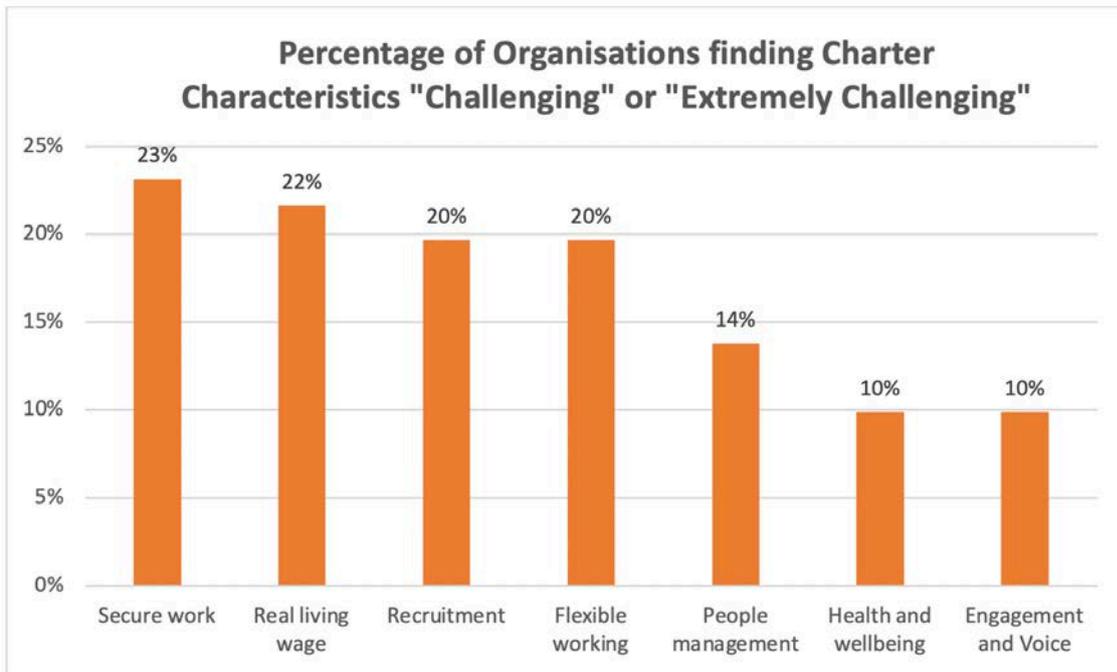
...and that the positive benefits of engaging on this journey could be stressed more in the marketing of the Charter,

"I wonder if the Charter misses a bit of trick with the standards, because I think that they're seen as, quite often in my experience, as a cost to business, so perhaps the Charter isn't doing enough champion the commercial benefits of putting those things in place." (CL1, Private Sector, SME)

Perceptions of the Individual Employment Characteristics

We now turn to views on the individual employment characteristics. Figure 3 shows to the extent to which respondents felt each of the characteristics to be challenging or otherwise,

Figure 3: Level of Challenge Presented by Each Charter Characteristic



In all cases, well over half of the respondents felt that the characteristic was either ‘not very challenging’ or ‘not challenging at all’, and 25% of respondents found none of the characteristics to be ‘challenging’ or ‘very challenging’ to meet. Between 10 and 25% of respondents identified particular characteristics as ‘challenging’ or ‘very challenging’ to meet or continue to meet. It appears that most organisations that engage with the Charter feel that they already meet many of the characteristics – or do so having made changes in order to achieve Membership – or do not envisage a challenge in doing so. However, there was a significant minority who found particular characteristics a challenge to meet. There was no clear pattern of difference between Charter Members and Supporters/others in the challenges perceived by the characteristics

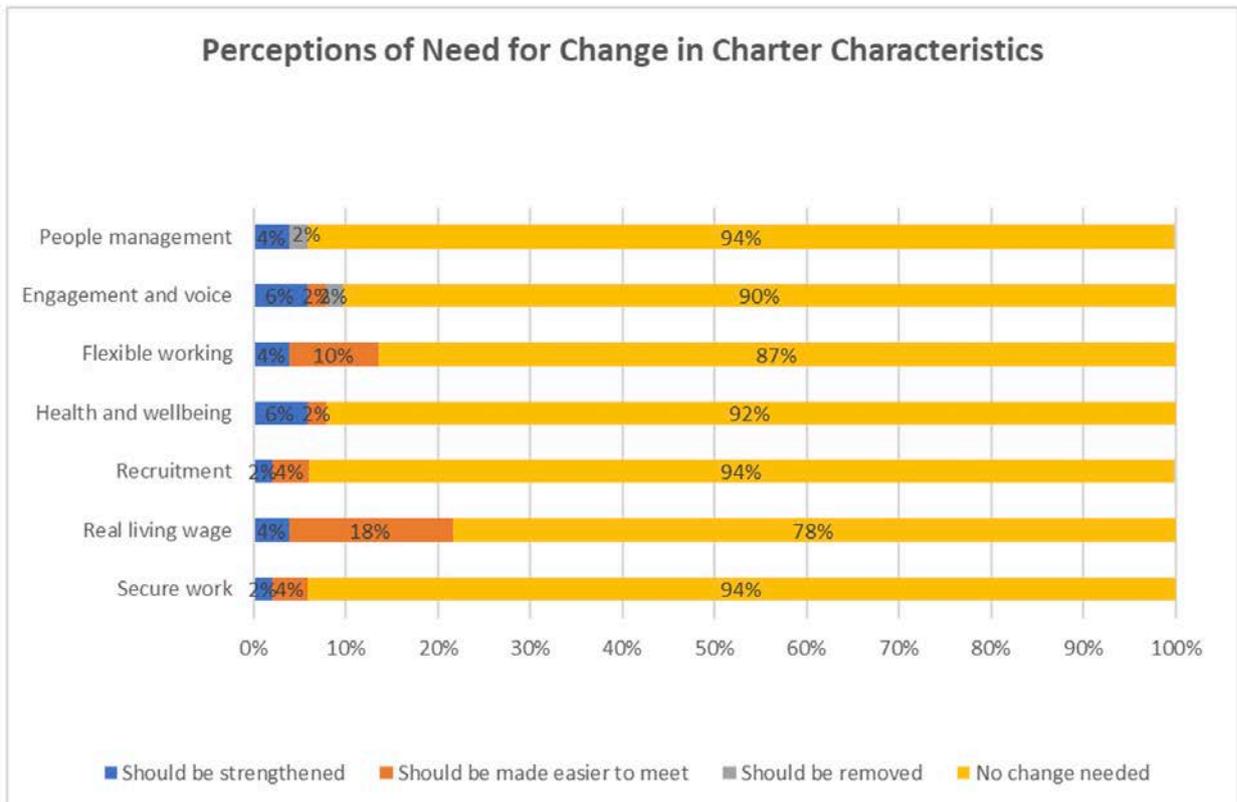
– though Charter Members were more likely than Supporters to report being challenged by the people management characteristic– suggesting that the challenges may be mostly driven by organisational circumstances rather than the being related to the organisations’ stage in their Charter journey.

‘Health and Wellbeing’, ‘Employee Voice’ and ‘People Management’ were seen as the least challenging characteristics, while ‘Secure Work’, ‘Real Living Wage’, ‘Flexible Working’ and ‘Recruitment’ were more commonly reported as being ‘challenging’ or ‘very challenging’ to meet. There were some patterns of difference in how organisations perceived the challenge of meeting the characteristics. Public sector organisations were more likely than private sector

ones to report being challenged by the ‘Secure Work’ characteristic, though this pattern was reversed in relation to ‘Flexible Working’. Small organisations were less likely than medium- sized organisations to report being challenged by the Real Living Wage characteristic. We also found a geographical difference in how firms perceived the challenge presented by the characteristics. In relation to each characteristic, firms whose largest workplace was outside the City of Manchester found the characteristics more challenging than those whose largest workplace was in the City of Manchester. It seems likely that these could be sector or size effects rather than geographical ones, and this would be an interesting point to test with a larger sample.

We asked respondents whether they felt that any characteristics needed to be either changed or removed from the Charter. As Figure 4 shows, overwhelmingly they felt that no change was required to the characteristics, however there was minority opinion that changes were needed.

Figure 4: Perceptions of the Need for Change in the Charter Characteristics



In respect of each characteristic a small number of respondents felt that the characteristic should be 'strengthened'. Slightly more respondents (overall) thought that particular characteristics should be made easier to meet, and this reached a noticeable minority in respect of 'Flexible Working' (10%) and the 'Real Living Wage' (18%). The 'Real Living Wage' characteristic attracted some commentary in the free text area of the survey. This tended to be supportive of the principle of the characteristic, but reflected concerns about the practicalities. In particular, commentary focused on the position relating to contractors/suppliers paying the Real Living Wage, and a feeling that without this requirement the Charter would lack 'teeth', but that with it it would make things prohibitively difficult for small firms and public sector bodies in particular. These survey comments are illustrative,

Not all small employers can adhere to RLW amongst the Supply Chain and to say so, I feel, is just a tick box exercise. We don't have the weight to demand it of our suppliers. I feel the commitment should be towards the small employees [employees of the small firm].

Major loophole at present as members do not have to comply re sub-contractors - should either be strengthened or removed as unattainable by public sector.

and this was also reflected in interview responses, for example,

"My biggest hesitation and concern is around budgets really and you'll probably know where I'm coming from here. You know when you are a public-funded body, funded in a particular way, it can be very difficult. You know if you are making commitments around things like the Foundation Living Wage." (CL2, Education)

There were also concerns raised, by a very small number of survey respondents about the 'Secure Work' characteristic,

We have to use agency staff and also have some casual staffThis has presented a complete barrier to us becoming full members which is very frustrating when we have such a strong employment offer.

And in the interviews,

".. and when I saw, you know, the assessment criteria [for flexible working], I thought 'eek' how are we going to address that one?" (CL2, Education)

And the 'Engagement and Voice' characteristic,

Still 'undercooked' - key to the Charter and lacks substance.

A quarter of survey respondents suggested that new elements could usefully be added to the characteristics. Survey comments suggested that equality, inclusion and diversity (IED) issues were important areas,

my preference is still for a specific "pillar" assessing commitment to IED - even if it is supposed to be embedded in the others.

Diversity and Inclusion as a specific area, not just a part of recruitment. It is about how people feel working for the organisation and specifically their routes to progression.

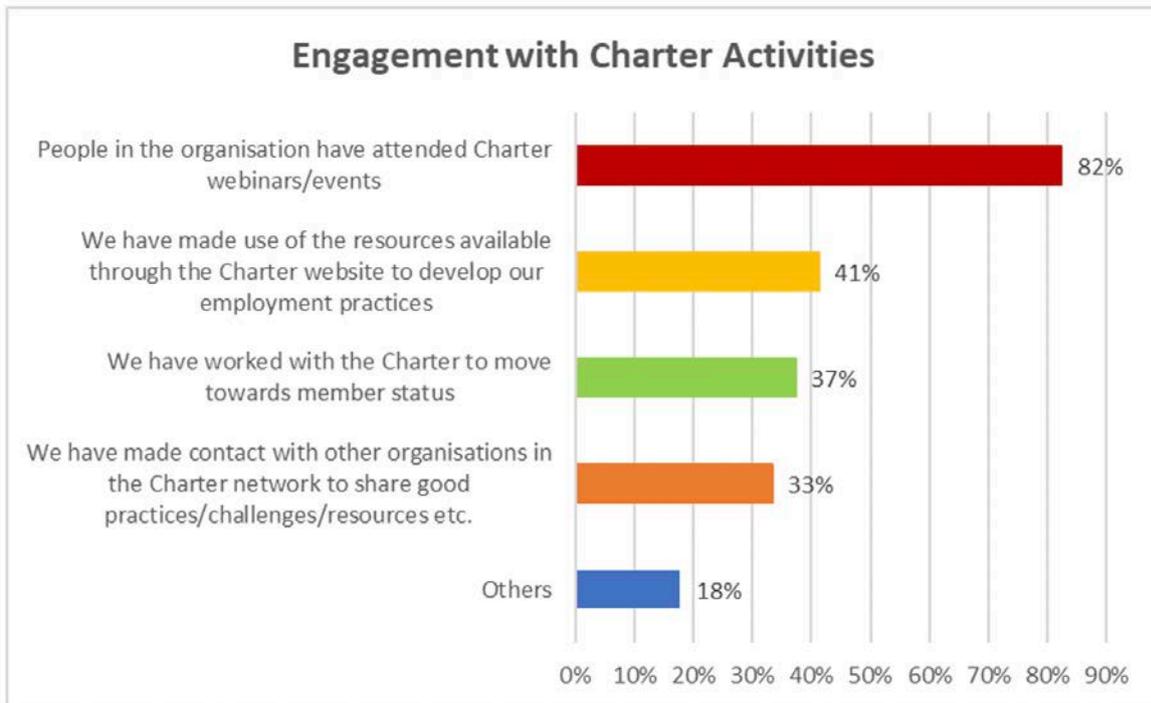
Environmental/green aspects of employment was another area mentioned more than once. The possibility of having 'skills development' as a separate characteristic was also mentioned. Finally, the need to refresh the characteristics to take into account the pandemic/post pandemic employment environment was mentioned by more than one survey respondent.

In summary, respondents generally found the Charter characteristics to have good coverage and to provide an appropriate challenge. A minority of respondents felt that particular characteristics, particularly 'Real Living Wage' and 'Flexibility' presented specific difficulties for some types of organisation, and there were also some suggestions for broadening the coverage of the Charter to other areas of 'good employment'.

2.1.5 Engaging with the Charter Network

In this section we report responses from organisations to questions about their engagement with the Charter network. Figure 5 indicates the different ways in which organisations reported that they had engaged with the Charter, showing the percentage that had engaged with each type of activity/service (multiple responses were possible so percentages do not total 100).

Figure 5: Organisations' Engagement with the Charter Network and Activities

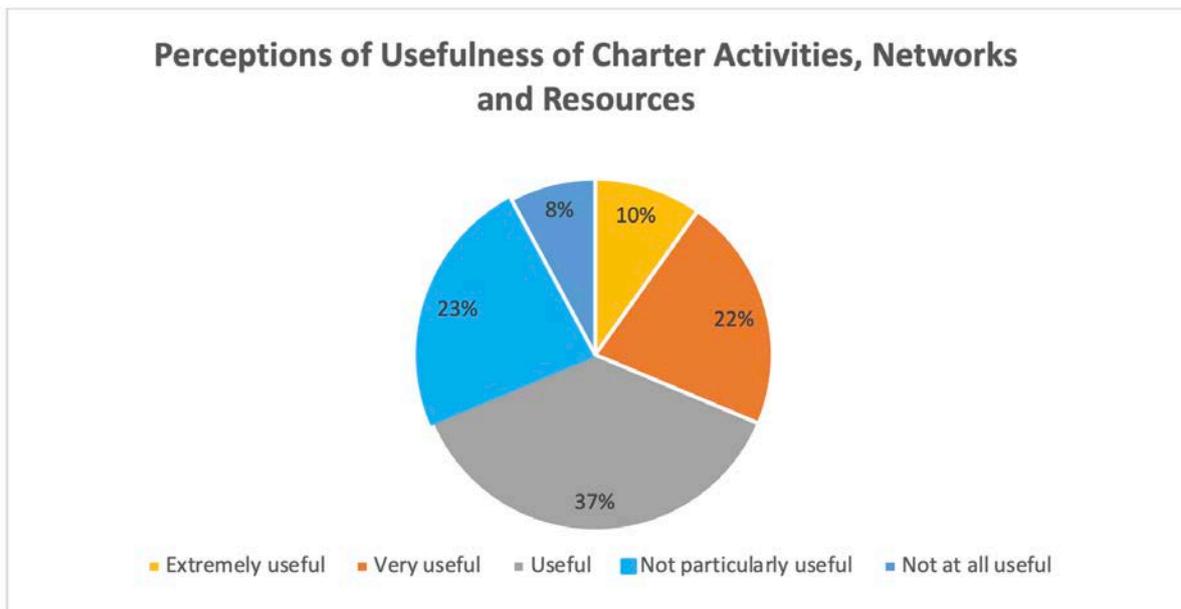


It is clear that there has been a good range of engagement with Charter activities, with webinar attendance being the most frequent engagement. There were no organisations that reported that they had not engaged in any Charter activities at all.

In terms of attendance at webinars and other events, 28% reported that they were regular attenders and 64% that they were occasional attenders – only 8% had not attended any such events. Supporters were less likely to report regular attendance than Members, private sector organisations less likely to do so than public and third sector organisations. Seventy-three percent

of organisations reported that they accessed the Charter network’s resources at least occasionally, though only 4% said that they did so regularly.

We asked respondents how useful they found the Charter’s network and activities in meeting the characteristics and developing employment practices. The results are shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: The Perceived Value of Charter Activities, Networks and Resources

As the chart shows, more than two-thirds of respondents (69%) found the Charter’s webinar and network activities to be (at least) useful. This favourable view was reflected in interview responses, and survey comments. The webinars generally received favourable commentary,

“And I think that the webinars have been absolutely brilliant for just kind of like thinking, ok this is what you are doing, is there anything else we could be doing? What are other people doing?” (CL2, Education)

“...certainly, how they get people to talk about their experiences at these webinars is massively useful I think.” (CL6, Education)

There were a few comments in the interviews and survey which indicated ways in which the webinars might be improved,

“ ... a lot of the events are quite practice or theory led, and I think that is really good, but I think as an SME, I’d quite like to know what other employers like us are doing so I can learn and benchmark and think, how might I like to try that. And I wonder if there’s a place for the employer to kind of facilitate or lead some of those events so that people can get that, and learn from them.” (CL 1, Private Sector, SME)

We have found the events more evangelical than practical (i.e.

emphasising the importance of doing something rather than helping you do it). If people are in the room, they’re already willing - what they need is support on the practicalities.

The Charter network was widely acknowledged as having value for organisations, both in terms of making connections with other organisations...

“...but we’ve made some really good contacts through just the networking side of that as well. [for example] Two engineers we worked with in one of the informal group meetings, and they got in touch with us because they wanted to talk to us about some of the stuff that we’ve done as part of our work with the Charter.” (CL2, Education)

“...it’s always quite interesting from a networking perspective to see what other people are doing, because whilst we’ve got very high standards, there’s certain things you just wouldn’t know about unless you were speaking to other organisations.” (CL7, Private Sector)

Attending Charter events (pre COVID-19) enabled me to strengthen my network - as I’m standalone HR.

... but also in terms of being part of a community with shared values...

“... and being able to see yourself in that local community and be able to rely on a fall back and use them, and them use you. That to me is the value.” (CL6, Education)

“Cos all the people I have had the pleasure of coming across as part of this, whether via the networks, the webinars or just making those individual links, you can feel it if you buy into the values and they recognize the value that this brings to individuals or organisations to community, right across the borough .. and that is something quite special and I think that probably could be tapped into in a big way..” (CL2, Education)

.... and from being able to broaden horizons and change perspectives through connecting with organisations in other sectors and locations,

“You can get a little sector stuck..... and then you limit yourself because you are not seeing what other areas are doing and what other firms are innovating....” (CL6, Education)

“And I think one of the things that I’ve learned from the Charter meetings is that there’s a real lot of kind of commonality between small to medium enterprises in the private sector and in the voluntary sector, and I don’t think I appreciated that before.” (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

“We are a very small organisation so we don’t have an HR department.... So, I think it has been really useful to talk to other people about what they are doing and to kind of learn from that and to take that back in terms of ... enhancing my role within the management team.” (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

The resources provided by the Charter were less frequently commented on, but there was some commentary in survey responses that these were of value. There was an isolated comment to the effect that Charter events were not communicated well.

The survey invited respondents to indicate if there were any additional services that the Charter could provide. There were a small number of responses

to this. Two respondents suggested that mentoring could be a useful addition; one in relation to mentoring organisations through the membership process, and another in relation to mentoring from larger organisations to stand alone HR practitioners in small organisations. Other responses suggested further developing the networking side of the Charter and improving communications.

It would be highly useful for the Charter to facilitate more networking amongst its members both to learn from each other, but also to build more active networks for business referrals.

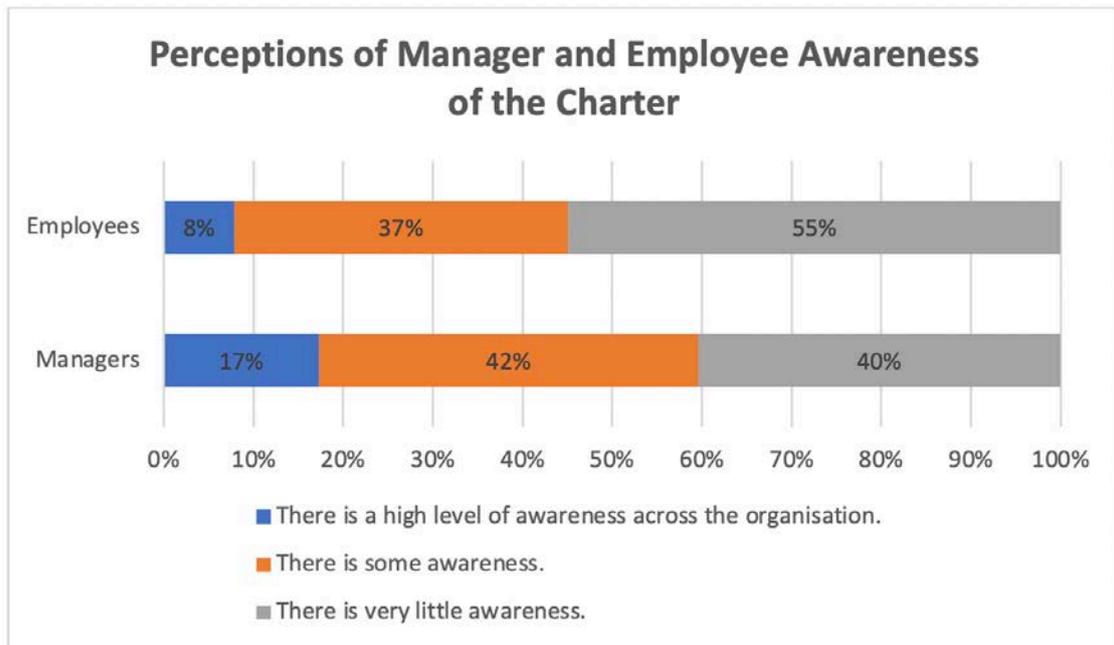
On most measures, organisations that report that they engage more regularly with the Charter activities are more likely to report improvements in employment practice and wider organisational benefits, however these are small differences, and further data would be required to establish statistically robust support for such a relationship

Engaging with the Charter during the Pandemic

We asked respondents how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on their engagement with the Charter. This showed a clear perception of reduced engagement – 58% of organisations said they had engaged less with the Charter (or not at all) as a result of the pandemic than they would otherwise have done. Of those who had engaged with the Charter during the pandemic 43% reported that it had been helpful to them in dealing with the employment issues created by the crisis,

“The Charter did step up with those, some webinars that were very practical, operational, helped the people managing things from anything from furlough to health and safety and things like that.” (CL2, Education)

“What I found really helpful is the webinars... particularly at the start of the lockdown, they were invaluable to me just as a sense check because obviously we all went through .. a very difficult time. That gave us, I think, gave a lot of confidence, because we were concerned at some of the steps that we were having to take and making sure, you know, it was the right thing to do.” (CL3, Private Sector)

Figure 7: Perceptions of Manager and Employee Awareness of the Charter

The fantastic Charter team and events have been a great lifeline in these uncertain and worrying times - especially in the early days of the pandemic but really, throughout.

I think also, in a leadership role - the Charter has helped to support my own wellbeing and helped me to feel less isolated during what has been an incredibly challenging and testing time.

Promotion of the Charter by Organisations

Finally, we were interested to find out the extent to which organisations promoted the Charter both internally and externally. First, we asked about levels of awareness of the Charter amongst managers and employees. Figure 7 indicates the responses.

As may have been anticipated, awareness was perceived to be higher amongst the management communities than staff, but it appears that in both cases there is some room for raising awareness within Charter organisations, as illustrated by this response,

“So, I think it is probably the next step for us to think about how we engage with the wider organisation so that they can see what we do [in relation to the Charter].” (CL7, Private Sector)

That said, some interview responses suggested that there were organisations where staff awareness was high, and that the benefits of this were perceived,

“...and the voice that has come back from staff is how proud they are to be working somewhere that is recognized in this way. It’s phenomenal. It’s also helped enhance our ability to recruit.” (CL2, Education)

“You know, by far the majority of staff absolutely recognized that (Charter membership) and were delighted.” (CL2, Education)

Respondents were asked whether their organisation was a member of any other employment charters. Twenty-nine percent of organisations reported that they were. Being a member of more than one Charter was overwhelmingly seen as beneficial, 89% of respondents who did so agreed or strongly agreed that this was a positive thing. These survey responses were illustrative of the perceived benefits of engaging with more than one charter/employment standard.

Helps improve practices from different perspectives.

Despite being a national/global organisation, such charters help root us in places and reflect local priorities.

Respondents were asked whether their organisation promoted the Charter through their suppliers. Of those for whom this was applicable, 42% said that they did this 'actively' or 'to an extent'. Fifty-eight percent of respondents felt that it was likely that their organisation would become an 'Advocate' of the Charter in the future, suggesting a widespread appetite for using the Charter as a means to promote good employment more widely, as illustrated here,

"... we feel we are in a great place to be able to go out and support other people and we've got the tools and the resources and the expertise to be able to do that. So, we'd be quite comfortable going out and working with the companies and organisations to get them into a place where they're offering this fairness and consistency." (CL7, Private Sector)

Overall, the data suggest that there has been good engagement with the Charter. Webinars were a well-used feature, though engagement in other aspects was more variable. In general, those organisations engaged with the Charter reported that it was beneficial. There is some suggestion in the data that greater engagement leads to better impact, but this a tentative finding that requires further exploration as the evaluation progresses. The data suggest that engagement has been affected by the pandemic, though also that the support from the Charter had helped a number of organisations address challenges created by Covid-19. The extent of awareness of the Charter within organisations, particularly amongst employees, appears to be fairly modest.

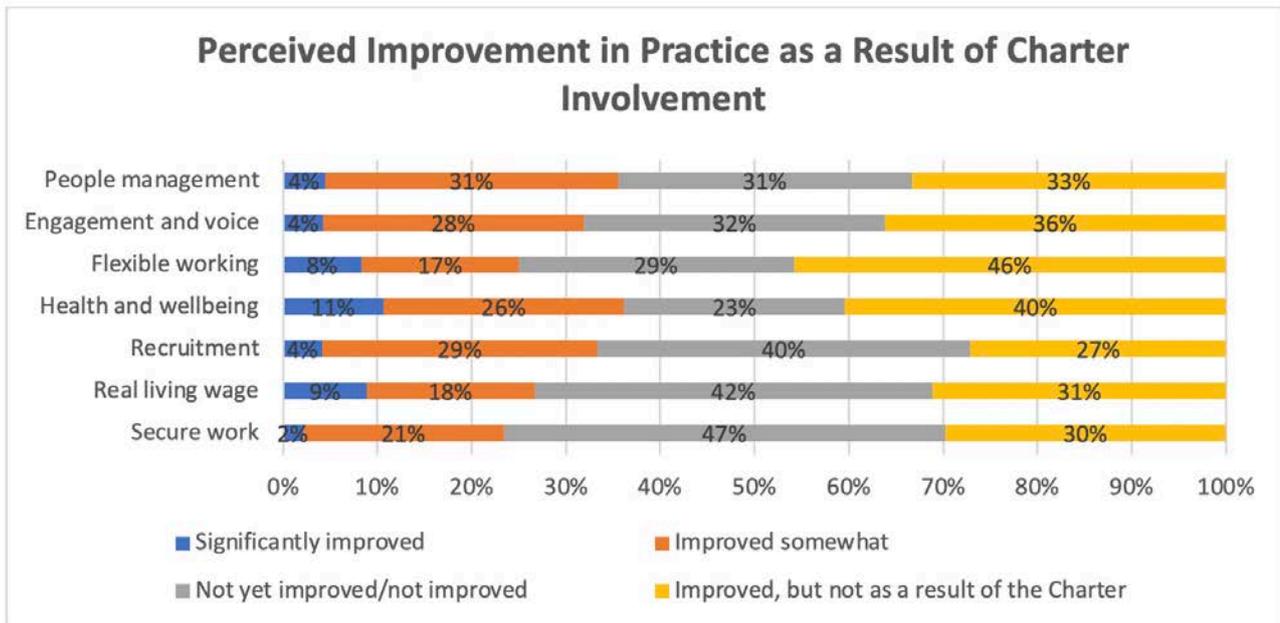
2.1.6 The Impact of the Charter

Here we were interested in respondents' perceptions of the way that engagement with the Charter had impacted on their organisation, both on employment practices specifically, and more widely.

Impact on Employment Practices

We asked respondents how the Charter had impacted on employment practice in each of the areas covered by the Charter characteristics. The results are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Perceived Improvements in Management Practices Arising from the Charter



Typically, between a quarter and a third of organisations identified improvements in practice that had resulted wholly or partly from the Charter. Given that the Charter has been running for a little over a year, and this has coincided with the pandemic, this may be considered to be a positive response. The most frequently cited areas where improvements had been made were ‘Health and Wellbeing’, ‘Recruitment’, ‘Engagement and Voice’ and ‘People Management’, but even in the areas identified by respondents as the most challenging (see above), ‘Real Living Wage’ and ‘Flexible Working’, around a quarter of organisations reported Charter-related improvements. A majority of organisations (53%) reported an improvement, attributed to the Charter, in at least one aspect of employment practice. Furthermore, 70% of organisations felt that their employment practices would improve/continue to improve as they engaged further with the Charter.

There were few clear differences in relation to reported improvements on the basis of Charter membership, sector or size, though there were some. Public sector organisations were more likely than private sector ones to report improvements relating to ‘Real living wage’ and ‘Engagement and Voice’, and third sector organisations more than private sector ones in ‘Health and Well-

being’. Medium-sized organisations were more likely than larger organisations to report Charter-related improvements in ‘Health and Wellbeing’ and ‘People Management’. There were no clear relationships between organisations’ membership status or geography (location of their largest workplace within Greater Manchester) and reported Charter-related improvements.

Many interviewees spoke about improvements in specific areas of employment practice that resulted from engagement with the Charter, for example,

The Charter definitely made us do that [the Real Living Wage] in that very considered and measured [way] rather than a reactive, oh yes this we can do it, this we cannot..... the more forward-looking approach to it definitely did that.” (CL2, Education)

“.....we have a challenge with diversity, we are 75% white male and we have a lot of people with long service.....and that’s where the Charter has helped us to kind of just challenge ourselves a little bit more.” (CL5, Private Sector)

A number of respondents reported improvements in the field of employee voice related to an employee engagement platform, ‘Stribe’, which

has been trialled in a small number of Charter organisations, and has been used independently by others,

“So I think you know that is a central pillar of the Charter isn’t it, of what you are doing about your, how you’re collecting your employee voice, their views, and when people are completely dispersed and remote and you’re not seeing them then (that’s difficult)... So that side of it, the employee voice and making sure we were capturing it.. and acting on... it [Stribe] has helped phenomenally.” (CL2, Education)

There was also a reported sense that the process of engaging the Charter stimulated reflection on existing practice and prompted improvements,

“I think it [the Charter] pushed us a little bit to think about the next step, and the next step, and the next step, which is what we should always be doing.” (CL 6, Education)

“...you can take some of this (HR) stuff for granted a little bit.... so it is quite exciting for team to go through a process and say, ‘ooh yea, we do that actually, or we should do more about certain things’. And, in particular, with that diversity lens on it was good to start challenging ourselves about the flexible working piece and are we doing enough around that and supporting with it.” (CL5, Private Sector)

One respondent explained how Charter-related improvements to practice reached well beyond greater Manchester,

“we haven’t just done this work [that resulting from the Charter] in our X [a GM borough] factory you know it has been across the board. So, it has impacted on the whole organisation, and actually even work that we are doing over in Y and Z (Asian countries) on some of the engagement tools we are now using. So yes, much further afield too.” (CL3, Private Sector)

Though one survey respondent suggested that the Charter needed to ‘change gear’ in order to maximise its impact,

We are proud supporters of the Charter. It feels like the Charter now needs to move from its early onboarding and ‘political’ phase into a more practical change-driving phase.

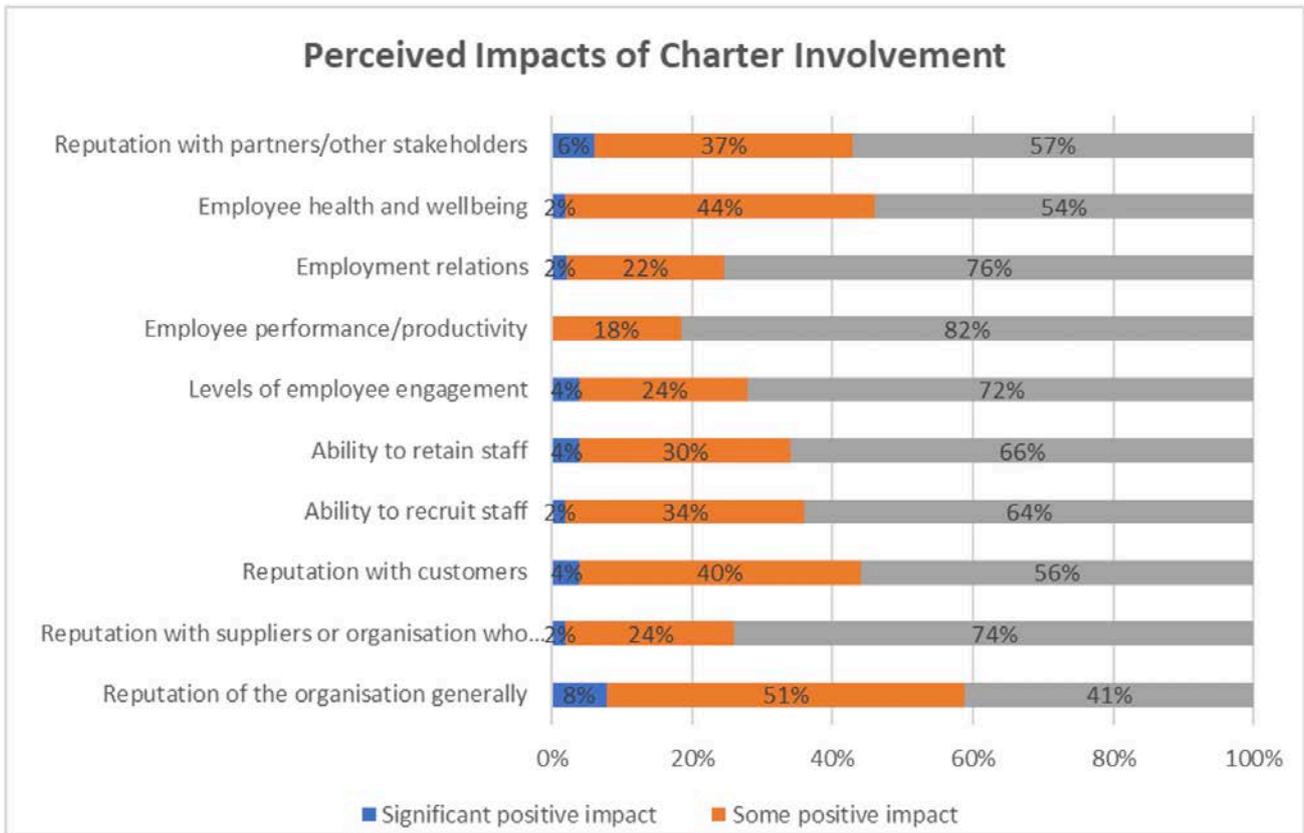
Wider Organisational Impacts

We then asked about the wider impact that respondents felt that the Charter had had on their organisation. The results are shown in Figure 9.

Reputational impacts (among customers, stakeholders, and in the community generally) were some of the strongest impacts reported. Improved employee health and wellbeing was another strong area, along with recruitment and retention benefits – the latter reported by around a third of organisations. Impacts on productivity and employment relations were less commonly reported, these effects perhaps take longer to emerge, but even here around a quarter of organisations reported positive impact from the Charter. No respondents reported that the Charter had a negative impact on the organisation in any of these respects, though fifteen respondents (29%) did not report a positive impact in any of the aspects posed in the question.

Patterns in the data suggest that Charter Members were more likely than those in other membership categories to report positive impacts on most aspects, and this was most noticeable in respect of the ‘reputational’ measures – for example ‘reputation of the organisation’ and ‘reputation with customers’. Sectoral differences were less noticeable, though improved retention was more commonly mentioned by private sector organisations. Medium-sized organisations appeared to benefit the most from the Charter in practical aspects, for example the ability to recruit and retain, employee engagement, employee relations and employee wellbeing. The data suggest that small organisations might derive greater reputational benefits (internally and externally) than larger organisations, but this finding would need to be corroborated with further data.

Figure 9: The Perceived Impacts on Organisations of Charter Involvement.



The following extracts from the interviews illustrate some of the impacts that the Charter is perceived to have had,

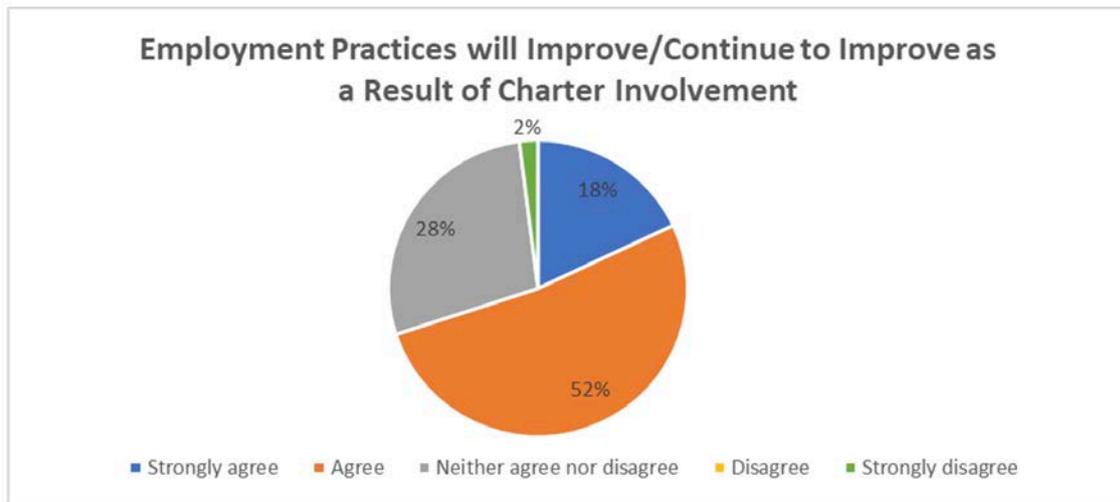
“...we can struggle to recruit- people don't come in the voluntary sector for the pay, so it like helps to be able to ...have that mark, kind of that you're a good employer” (CL4, Third Sector, SME)

“But I mean since, not necessarily since being accredited with the Charter, but since making a commitment to be a good employer, our profits are seven times what were they were before that..., and so for us we've seen that when people are happy they are much more efficient and much more creative and much more committed, and therefore your profits increase and your customers are happy and more loyal. And I don't think there's enough done (by

the Charter leadership) to really shout about that.” (CL1, Private Sector, SME)

“.. our customer 'sat' [satisfaction] has risen from 43% -to 98%. Our colleague 'sat' has going from 34%-100%, and 100% of people tell us that they are proud to work for us. So, they can see the value and they can see that if the business is fully engaged with the Charter for the right reasons, then they (other businesses) can achieve that too. That's not publicized enough.” (CL1, Private Sector, SME)

We asked respondents whether they anticipated future improvements in employment practice as a result of continued engagement with the Charter (figure 10).

Figure 10: Anticipated Improvements in Employment Practice as a Result of the Charter

As the chart shows, more than two-thirds of respondents anticipate improvements as a result of continued engagement with the Charter. Small organisations were more likely than large ones to anticipate improvements in employment practice.

Finally, we asked whether the benefits from the Charter outweighed the costs (in terms of, for example, management time). Sixty percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with that they did, and only 2 respondents disagreed.

In summary, the findings reported in this section indicate that a majority of organisations reported an improvement to employment practice as a result of Charter engagement, and that improvements were reported across the range of the Charter characteristics. Furthermore, a majority of organisations report that they expect employment practices to improve or continue to improve as their engagement with the Charter continues. Again, a sizeable minority of organisations report a positive impact on their organisation more widely, with reputational impacts being most commonly-cited, but also significant report of improvement in recruitment and retention, and health and wellbeing. Respondents were less likely to report that the effects of Charter engagement had fed through to improvements in employment relations or productivity or performance at this early stage.

2.1.7 Summary of the Charter Leads' Survey and Interview Findings

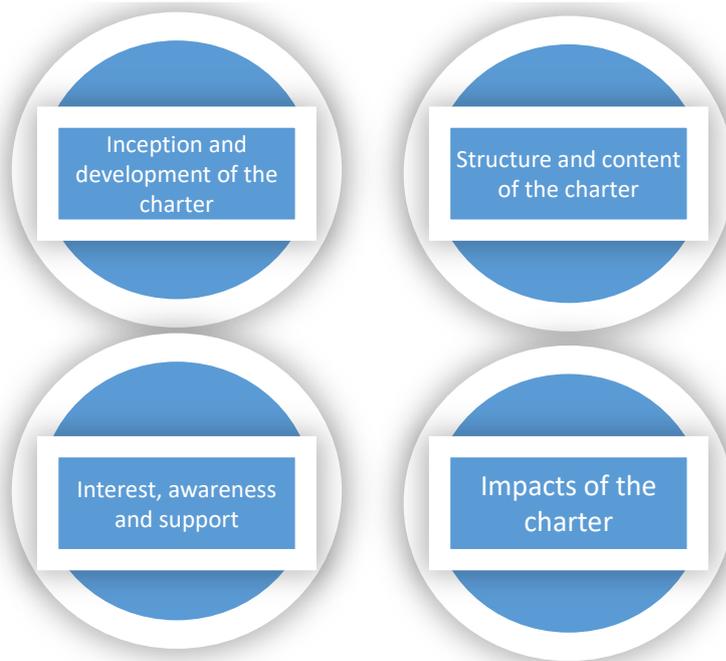
In summary, the findings suggest that organisations were drawn to engage with the Charter for reputational and recognition reasons, but also to make improvements to practice. In general, the process of joining or progressing through the Charter was seen as straightforward and supportive, though there were some voices to the contrary. The characteristics were generally perceived as 'fit for purpose', though there were reports of difficulties posed for some organisations in relation to some of the characteristics. Engagement with the Charters' network and activities seemed a little inconsistent, though the webinars were widely attended, though where engagement did take place it tended to be well-received. Levels of awareness of the Charter among organisations' employees and managers were generally not reported to be high. In terms of the impact of the Charter, many organisations reported Charter-related improvements in aspects of their employment practice, and also a range of wider organisational benefits.



2.2 Stakeholder Perspectives

In this section we report the perspectives of three stakeholders in Charter, each representing different interests: Ian MacArthur, Head of the Charter Implementation Unit; Clive Memmott, Chief Executive of the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Peter Urwin, Organiser, Unison. All three were involved in the consultations around the development of the Charter, served on the steering group and now on the Charter Board. We report their views on,

in turn; the inception and development of the Charter; interest in and awareness of the Charter; the structure and content of the Charter; and its impact, as these were the main themes emerging from the interviews.



2.2.1 Inception and Development of the Charter

Stakeholders reflected that they were generally positively disposed to the Charter as an idea when they first had engagement with it.

Peter indicated that there was support from a Trade Union perspective,

“... but for the Mayor to introduce a Charter it was a very welcome development, because it was using that political mandate to do something around employment standards... and we wanted it to be a meaningful thing that had real effect”. (Peter)

But he recognized, however, that there were some concerns within the Trade Union movement.

“... there was some scepticism in the Trade Union movement... [but] it didn't seem to be something where we'd in any way compromise our ability to speak independently for workers.. so it was something that we'd rather was good. If it was going to exist, we'd rather try and make it good and useful.” (Peter)

Ian had some concerns about the likely success for the Charter, from his experience of similar initiatives.

“Largely because I'd been around this kind of initiative in my career and seen them fall flat on their face, largely because they haven't got enough buy in.” (Ian)

Clive's concerns were that the Charter might be too prescriptive, and insufficiently flexible around the nature of good employment, given the different resources and environments of firms in different sectors of the economy.

The democratic and political nature of the Charter was something that was important from a Trade Union point of view,

“So, I think from a union perspective it's ever so important that the Charter, it started as a political initiative, as a democratic initiative. That there is a public will for something to be done about [the]employment standards of Greater Manchester.” (Peter)

And this linked through to the accountability and governance of the Charter,

“I think the key thing for us was that it is the Combined Authority [that] remains the decision maker really, ultimately, and they're linked to the democratic accountability through the Mayor, through the Councils.” (Peter)

Respondents expressed the view that the Charter had successfully involved a range of stakeholders with different perspectives and agendas in its development and management and that they had worked well together to develop a workable Charter and one that commanded broad support,

“...you had a real mix of what would have been divergent views. Yet, when I saw them [those working on the Charter] they were clearly wanting make the Charter a success.” (Ian)

“I mean I think it has been an achievement to keep a broad coalition of people supportive of it.” (Peter)

“I think we were reasonably sensible and fair. I think we struck a reasonable balance through most of the process... it's pretty fair.” (Clive)

There was agreement that the decision to create a 'Good Employment Charter', rather than a 'Good Employer Charter' (as had apparently originally been mooted), was a sound one. However, respondents had a different reasons for this view. For Clive, 'Good Employer' was too narrowly conceived, looking at 'employment through one prism', and it unhelpfully put employers into two discrete camps, while for Peter it placed too much emphasis on employer intentions rather than on the actual delivery of good employment practices themselves.

2.2.2 The Structure and Content of the Charter

Four main themes emerged from the interviewees' comments on this topic; the Charter's structure, its purpose, the Charter characteristics and progression arrangements, and potential links to public procurement. We address these in turn.

The Structure of the Charter

The Charter is structured with a Supporters' tier for those organisations that demonstrate a commitment to good employment and to working towards membership, and a Member tier for those

organisations who have had their employment practice accredited against the characteristics, and a proposed Advocate tier to enable established members to share good practice and support the development of good employment in participating organisations. The idea of Supporter tier had broad support among the stakeholders we spoke to, particularly in relation to a tiered set of accreditations,

“I think the structure of supporters and then having members... I think that was a good idea. I think that worked well.... what I wanted to avoid was it being through of as a sort of bronze, silver and gold... so a supporter is just someone who's interested in improving its employment standards... in joining a network of other employers who want to explore what good employment looks like.” (Peter)

There was support for the idea that the supporter tier would be drawn widely so as to encourage engagement and participation,

“So, I wasn't really trying to make it a very demanding hurdle for employers to cross to become a supporter. I was content with the idea that the main characteristic that these employers had to have was a willingness to improve really, and that they were, in good faith, they were wanting to be better employers.” (Peter)

“...There was a lot of conversation in the early days about ...the tiers.... and the progression route.... Now to me, I'm broadly speaking, as a marketeer, you want loads of companies to say '..... this is a really cool idea, this is about good practice and sharing.'” (Clive)

Again, there was some reluctance about making the 'Advocate' tier as a form of higher-level accreditation...

"I put a big question mark against the Advocate Tier [as originally conceived].... Goodness, we are not going through this process again ... you're a general then you're a five star general" (Ian)

..and support for it as conceived as part of the support mechanisms and involving employers in sharing experience and good practice,

"We've now decided that we'll use it as a kind of peer- to- peer support network, rather than recognising organisations or employers as Advocates." (Ian)

Purpose: Engaging Employers or Accrediting Them?

A recognition for the need for an appropriate balance between assessment and accreditation of employers, on the one hand, and engaging organisations in a dialogue around good employment, was shared by our respondents, though they did express different perspectives on this,

Clive stressed the engagement and dialogue agendas of the Charter,

"It's about hearts and minds, not regulation." (Clive)

"... it is a persuasive mechanism, not a regulatory bludgeon." (Clive)

"What you [could] see is that a disproportionate amount of resource goes into just the process around membership as opposed to really thinking about.... 'what does good employment look like?'" (Clive)

He also saw the Charter's Supporter's tier as having an important marketing function around the idea of good employment, and encouraging employers to engage with it, and was concerned that this was not lost sight of as the accreditation systems started to be implemented,

"The Good Employment Charter is an act of marketing really isn't it? That's what it is in reality." (Clive)

".. it is a marketing phase, you are gathering a grass roots amount of people who want to be attached to this... and then you are looking at your progression routes...it' s then a quasi- public government scheme.... You put numbers on things. It gets everyone talking about the wrong stuff." (Clive)

Peter appeared more inclined to emphasise the accreditation agenda of the Charter. He reported a view from Trade Union colleagues that for the Charter to have value it did need to have some regulatory clout,

".. I suppose the concern... amongst branches and the trade unions, the phrase that kept being used was 'oh it's got to have teeth'. That's what they would say, 'it's got to have teeth.'" (Peter)

Ian felt that a careful and acceptable balance had been achieved between these different agendas,

"I think what we've managed to achieve, this balance between accreditation and a movement – you know accreditation is very exclusive by its nature. They put a corale around a group of people and say, 'you're good, therefore everyone else isn't'. And we've been at pains to maintain that credible structure, yet at the same time have a movement that's inclusive." (Ian)

"Yeah, I think the whole Charter movement and the way in which we've tried to balance that accreditation and engagement piece is the critical bit of what we've managed to do here, and makes us a little bit different. A lot of Charters up and down the country have just been like 'you're chartered, so you go 'boom', you've got it', and we must resist that." (Ian)

Not all of the stakeholders seemed drawn to conceive of the Charter as a movement,

“So, I worry about ‘movement’ because then movement takes it back to, it tends to be, it does politicise it, slightly weaponize it if you’re not careful. But enthusiastic passion of people that want to talk about employer engagement and how we can actually set some standards and how we can set some aspiration for what ‘good’ looks like in its many forms, that’s terrific.” (Clive)

And the potential politicization of the Charter in this was a concern for Clive,

“I think one of the main challenges.. is it can become political if you let it be seen as the public sector pontificating to the private sector about what ‘good’ looks like. Well.... you’re absolutely on an utter hiding to nothing and everyone will just walk away from it then.” (Clive)

The Charter Characteristics and Progression Arrangements

Participants’ reflections on the development of the characteristics themselves revealed some tensions, particularly ensuring that the characteristics are realistic and achievable across a range of organisations, but sufficiently challenging to promote a ‘good employment’ agenda,

“An objective was to find criteria that would not scare off the small [organisations] but yet prove testing enough for the large [organisations] to engage with.” (Ian)

One concern expressed was that the characteristics could become overly prescriptive and inflexible,

“So, you move inexorably towards greater protection for more and more workers, and you’ve got to achieve a balance... you are not going to have the same rules applied in the retail and leisure and hospitality sectors as you are in the manufacturing sector.” (Clive)

“...and that’s the problem, when these things become increasingly developed and more systemized, that’s when the hypocrisies get exposed.” (Clive)

For Peter, a concern was that too much flexibility might be built in for different circumstances, with deleterious consequences for the effectiveness of the Charter,

“there was a danger that it could [have] become about ‘is this employer doing the best they can in the circumstances?’. But it’s not that ... it’s about whether a set of standards are met.... Now there’s an unfairness in that [given different employer circumstances], but it is not as unfair as saying people in different sectors have to put up with a different quality of employment. It’s a Good Employment charter where it is about whether these particular standards have been met or not. And I think that is the least bad way of doing it.” (Peter)

Peter reported that he had had a number of aspects that he wanted to see included in the Charter,

“So, in terms of content, the living wage was very important, but also stuff around secure hours was important.... We knew we wouldn’t get a ban on zero hours contracts... but we did want a provision that people’s contractual hours would better reflect their actual hours worked.” (Peter)

“It was important that there were requirements for employers to be willing to give access to unions if they didn’t currently recognise one. We’ve got provision along those lines for the Charter as well.... trade unions are mentioned positively in the Charter.. and this gives an opening to get into some employers potentially.” (Peter)

It was also important, from Peter's perspective, that robust assessment processes were in place before organisations could move to Member status. He suggested that, after some initial concerns, he was happier that this point had been reached,

"[In the beginning] we weren't really inclined to promote the Charter as we might have done because we weren't quite sure how good the assessment process was going to be. But I think we are a lot more comfortable with it now." (Peter)

There was a general sense among the stakeholders we interviewed that an appropriate balance had been achieved given the range of competing demands and the complexity of defining good employment. There was also a recognition that the characteristics of good employment needed to be dynamic,

"... we constantly need to test them [the characteristics]. We are constantly doing that in our interactions with employers." (Ian)

Charter Membership and Public Procurement

Another area where different perspectives surfaced was in the possibility of making Charter Membership in some way a requirement in public procurement processes. This was an important agenda for Peter representing a Trade Union perspective. Partly this was about appropriate use of public funds,

"We wanted for the Charter to mean that there wouldn't be public money spent in a way that promoted or accepted poor employment standards." (Peter)

But it was also about giving the Charter more leverage in raising employment standards,

"That [linking to procurement] is a tremendous tool really, or a tremendous lever for getting this widely introduced." (Peter)

"...we were worried that if it didn't have this element then it would be a very feeble effort to try and improve employment standards across the economy of Greater Manchester." (Peter)

Clive, from the Chamber of Commerce, did not appear to be against a link with employment in principle, but had some concerns about its practical effects,

"The politicians increasingly want to link it to things like procurement and I think you can, ...link parts of it to procurement ...[but] to do it across a wide band becomes incredibly exclusive... you see the smaller, worthy, people two or three tiers down the supply chain. The last thing you want to do is exclude people like that from procurement." (Clive)

2.2.3. Interest, Awareness and Support

Respondents generally spoke positively about the levels of interest and engagement that the Charter had been able to generate in its relatively short existence,

"I think we've started to build quite nicely a community of interest around good employment. I think our profile is very good.. we have established ourselves with in the wider Greater Manchester family if you like." (Ian)

"So, we are engaging currently with slightly over 250 employers at the moment, which isn't a bad number. The big number in that is it's well over 200,000 employees that are covered by our supporters alone, which is again a good number and a good achievement in such a short time." (Ian)

This was endorsed by Peter, with a caveat around the wider public awareness of the Charter,

"...they [the Growth Company] are doing their thing and getting employers engaged, and I think that's good. I think that the thing that hasn't really happened yet is that the Charter hasn't been popularised amongst the public in Greater Manchester. I think we have a role to play in that in due course." (Peter)

Ian noted that the pandemic had made it harder to interest and engage employers,

“I think in terms of engagement, obviously COVID-19 has had a huge impact on that. We just haven’t been able to reach out and employers similarly haven’t got the bandwidth to think about this.” (Ian)

2.2.4 Improvements and Impact

Generally, stakeholders were positive about the impact and achievements of the Charter to date. Ian drew attention to improvements to employment practice as a result of the Charter, resonating with data from the survey of Charter Leads,

“There are several cases of, you know, Real Living Wage employers, or Real Living Wage payment that’s moved because of our intervention.” (Ian)

“I think in some of the [Charter] characteristics [we’ve had an impact], I think Real Living Wage has to a focus on it now, I think flexible work has. Real renewed focus on health and wellbeing.” (Ian)

However, he was more guarded as to whether the Charter had yet had a wider impact,

“Again, I think [the impact] is at employer level. In terms of macro impact ... we’re nowhere near, let’s be honest. And I think part of the learning... is can initiatives like this have macro impact? We really need to build up a head of steam, quite a bit of momentum before we see that across the whole city”. (Ian)

Clive drew attention to the impact that the Charter had had in stimulating debate around ‘good employment’,

“Actually, this has grounded a debate about what good employment is in a huge city region. ...[T]he most important city region outside London that’s openly talking about this thing.... That in itself is terrific and it is ambitious and it’s progressive, and it makes a really important statement.” (Clive)

“We are really are proud of what we’ve got here, and we should be...” (Clive)

Though he did offer a note of caution,

“If it gets politicised and weaponised more, it will fail.” (Clive)

Peter offered a view as to what would, and would not, count as success for the Charter.

“I’ve never thought that the success or otherwise of it, should be judged by how many employers are members, because... I want it to be meaningful. You want it to be something that employers have to work to get and value when they’ve got it.” (Peter)

2.2.5 The Future of the Charter

Finally, we report some thoughts of the respondents on the future for the Charter.

Ian was aware that the continued development and growth of the Charter could be challenging as the economy emerged from the pandemic,

“I think that the state of the economy won’t help this. We are already facing a kind of ‘any job is a good job’ mentality. So that will be a constant challenge for us about getting messages across that good work practice is an investment, not just for your organisation, but for the city region moving forward.” (Ian)

Each respondent expressed a view around what they would like to see in terms of the development of the Charter. For Ian, it was geographical expansion of the Charter to neighbouring regions,

“I tell you what would really excite me, may be not excite me but it would make me happy, is if we could manage to get other geographies around us... aligned with ours.” (Ian)

Peter was hoping for the Charter to be linked to public procurement,

“What I’d really like to see in a year’s time is some contracts being issued that require Charter standards of employers...” (Peter)

And for consumer behaviour to be influenced,

“It would also be good..... if members of the public might favour employers who are members of the Charter in the same ways as they might favour a Fairtrade employer...” (Peter)

Clive felt that the Charter might usefully invest in specialist support for the development of the good employment agenda, and support for employer engagement with it,

“..there is an argument to say that a lot of your future resourcing should be more, almost ‘think-tank’ based.” (Clive)

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

The comments of the three stakeholders that we interviewed suggest that they all supported the idea of the Charter, even though some notes of initial caution had been expressed, and were eager to work towards it being a success. All three respondents were positive about the way in which different stakeholders had worked together to reach compromises on the ‘shape’ of the Charter, and furthermore were broadly content with where the Charter had ‘landed’. The existence of the ‘Supporter’ tier, in particular, was welcomed as a good way of engaging employers and promoting good employment, and there was a consensus that the Charter Implementation Unit had done a good job in promoting the Charter, and that the level of engagement with the Charter was good, particularly given the difficult circumstances of its first year of operation. All saw challenges ahead, both around Charter design and development issues and the continuing difficult economic context that was envisaged.

The interviews revealed some differences in perspectives around the Charters’ purpose, design and development. In particular, there is something of a contrast between the views of those respondents from Trade Union and Employer organisations. The former emphasized the purpose of the Charter as setting out a robust set of memberships standards, consistently applied across all organisations, and with the Charter used proactively to drive up standards, for example through links to public procurement. The latter was more inclined to emphasise the communication and marketing aspects of the Charter, seeing it as a vehicle to develop the concept of good employment, promote it, and engage employers with it. The fact that Charter had been able to accommodate a range of different perspectives in its design and implementation was seen as notable achievement by the respondents. Working with different emphases, and indeed the differing perspectives of other stakeholders who we were not interviewed at this stage, is likely to be feature of the continuing development of the Charter.

3. Conclusions

In this section we pull together themes from the various elements of the research to draw conclusions on the development, progress and impact of the Charter. We are reporting on the first stage of the evaluation and methodological limitations and the unusual circumstances that have pertained in the first year of the Charter's operation mean that these are tentative conclusions. However, it is hoped that they will provide useful pointers for reflection on the Charter and a basis for its continued development and further evaluation. We reflect on the motivations and engagement of Charter organisations (research objective 1), their experience and impact (research objective 2) and the reflections of stakeholders (research objective 5).

The first thing to say is that Greater Manchester has designed and implemented a Good Employment Charter and has been able to encourage a significant number of organisations to engage with it. It is clear from the stakeholder interviews that there is a difficult balance to strike between, on the one hand, having a robust and challenging system of accreditation of employers and, on the other, engaging a wide range of organisations with the agenda for good employment. It is also true that different stakeholders in the Charter may see this balance differently, so it may be considered an important achievement of the Charter that it has both engaged with a broad range of stakeholders in the design and implementation, and produced a Charter which the stakeholders and organisations that we spoke to or surveyed found to be - with some reservations or caveats - acceptable and workable. The design of a Supporters' tier to engage employers with good employment and the network of activities and resources to help them develop employment practice towards membership – alongside an operating membership assessment system – looks to have been key in achieving this balance. Reaching an acceptable understanding of 'good employment' and operationalising it, is also a significant challenge, and one that the Charter has appeared to have negotiated with some success. However, there is a need to regularly refresh this understanding and assess the impact.

As noted in the introduction to the report, the Charter has engaged over 200 organisations and covers over 200,000 employees. It is difficult to put a figure on what a good level of organisational engagement by this stage would be – not least because the agenda for broad engagement with good employment and the agenda for robust and challenging assessment pull in different directions. However, it is clear that the Charter has had some good traction among local employers. From the organisational interviews, the strong political backing for the Charter, and its positioning as a distinctive local initiative seemed to be a factor in this.

There was a feeling among organisational respondents that the Charter leadership could do more to raise awareness of the benefits for organisations of engaging with the good employment agenda, and that this would in turn support the development of the Charter and the achievement of its objectives.

There is sometimes a concern with initiatives of this kind that they serve to recognise organisations that already have good employment practices and fail to engage those organisations that are in most need of developing them. The interview and survey data from organisations certainly indicated that recognition of existing employment practice, and the internal and external reputational benefits that this brings, were important reasons for engaging with the Charter. However, this was also often accompanied with a desire to play an active role in disseminating good employment practice, as the high level of interest in the 'Advocate' tier also suggests. Furthermore, the majority of organisations in the survey indicated that improving employment practice and receiving support for doing so were significant reasons, or among the reasons, for joining the Charter. Engagement with the Charter support network, activities and resources in order to do this was more mixed. The webinars were widely attended, and generally regarded as useful, though there was less evidence of use of the Charter resources and networking opportunities. The data also suggest that there is more for organisations to do to raise awareness of the Charter amongst their managers and employees.

The Charter's good employment characteristics were largely seen by organisational respondents as presenting a realistic and sufficiently flexible challenge. However, there were a minority of organisations that identified challenges in relation to particular characteristics, and there were some indications that particular characteristics lacked flexibility to accommodate different organisational circumstances – but also that criteria in certain areas needed to be tightened or broadened in scope. Joining the Charter and moving to membership were generally seen as straightforward and well-supported processes,

though there were some exceptions to this view.

As to the impact of the Charter, the survey data suggest that between a quarter and a third of organisations have identified improvements in their employment practice in relation to the different good employment characteristics as a result of engaging with the Charter. It is difficult to evaluate this response, not least because these are self-reports and the evaluation has not yet been able to assess the employee perspective, but given that the Charter has been in operation for just over a year, and also given the impact of the pandemic, it seems reasonable at this stage to view this as encouraging. It will be important to track this finding as the evaluation continues to see if the impact is sustained and develops. Perception of wider impact on organisations was also encouraging, with around half of organisations reporting reputational benefits of various kinds, and a slightly lower proportion reporting other improvements, for example in employee health and wellbeing, recruitment and retention, and engagement. There was less evidence of the Charter's impact feeding through to employment relations improvements, or performance or productivity gains (though there was some), though this is likely to be time-sensitive and is something to track as the Charter develops.

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is some continuing work for the Charter to do to broaden its reach in the community of employers in Greater Manchester in order to develop engagement further. However, it also appears from the evidence that we have gathered so far, that Greater Manchester has a functioning 'Good Employment Charter', with a design that achieves a good balance between different objectives, and which has broad support from a range of stakeholders. It has also attracted engagement from a good number and range of Greater Manchester employers. These are not inconsiderable achievements. Early evidence shows some encouraging signs that it may be having some positive impacts on employment standards and organisational outcomes but this requires corroboration as the evaluation develops.

4. Next Steps

On the basis of the evaluation so far, we see these as next steps for the Charter, and its evaluators, to consider,

For Charter Leadership

- Continue to work to engage more Greater Manchester employers, including those organisations in most need of support to develop employment practices
- Publicise further the benefits of engagement with the Charter
- Review the offer for members/supporters particularly in terms of networking and resources, to encourage greater engagement
- Tap into a desire for Charter members to help disseminate good practice, perhaps through the development of the 'Advocate' tier
- Continue to review the Charter's 'good employment' characteristics in response to feedback from stakeholders and to changing circumstances
- Continue to review the administrative processes for joining the Charter, and for progressing to Membership
- Continue to consider the potential to link the Charter in relation to public procurement and the challenges of doing so

For the Evaluation Study

- Obtain manager and employee perspectives on the Charter
- Elicit a wider range of stakeholder perspectives on the Charter
- Further explore the impact of the Charter, drawing on organisational and employee experiences and other data