

Improving Employment Conditions in Islington: Tackling Work-Based Harms and Promoting Unionisation

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About Islington Council

Islington is a small densely populated, inner London Borough with a growing, diverse and relatively young population. It is also a borough of stark contrasts. Across London, Islington has the fourth highest level of income inequality.

As a local authority Islington Council has a range of services and departments. The eight directorates within the council are: children and young people, adult social care; environment and climate change; homes and neighbourhoods; resources; public health; communities, strategy and change; community wealth building.

This work currently sits within the community wealth building directorate however it has been a collaboration across departments from frontline services to strategy-focused teams within the council.

About IoSS, Sheffield Hallam University

The Sheffield Institute of Social Sciences at Sheffield Hallam University is a large multidisciplinary Institute that addresses contemporary issues on the climate and environment, geography, planning, politics, psychology and sociology. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/sheffield-institute-of-social-sciences>

About CBIR, University of Staffordshire

The Centre for Business Innovation and Regions is a Research Centre, part of the School of Digital, Technology, Innovation and Business, University of Staffordshire. The Centre is committed to applied impactful research that engages with policy and practice. Analysing inequalities, employment and welfare; innovation and leadership; and regional economic development, regeneration and foundational economies. <https://www.staffs.ac.uk/research/centres-and-groups/centre-for-business-innovation-and-the-regions>

About CAPE

Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) is a knowledge exchange and research project exploring how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals. We are a partnership between UCL and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Northumbria and Nottingham, funded by Research England. We are working in collaboration with the Government Office for Science, the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, Nesta and the Transforming Evidence Hub.

Note – while this report draws on the perspectives of interviewees, the findings have been selected and organised by the authors and may not fully represent the views of individuals and the organisations they represent. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Foreword

Our mission over the next decade is to create a more equal Islington, where everyone has an equal chance to thrive. As a council we aim to put economic, social, and environmental justice at the centre of everything that we do, working with and for communities, making it easier to get involved and making sure that everyone's voice can be heard.

Islington is one of the most dynamic parts of the UK economy. However, the borough is also a place where many local people experience poverty and disadvantage. Wages are failing to keep up with the cost of living for nearly all workers. Local businesses are also feeling financial pressures, especially those in the hospitality and retail sectors. Local people must be at the heart of our local economy, but for too long they have not been fully included. Many are unfairly denied access to good quality employment with opportunities for progression, and a healthy environment in which to live and thrive.

In Islington, tackling inequality is central to our economic and social justice challenge. We are profoundly aware that wealth is structured along class and race lines, and it is gendered. Poverty and inequality are shaped in different places and spaces by the intersection of class, race, gender, disabilities, and other inequalities. It is vital that we reset the power dynamic on who sets the direction of growth and development – towards a new economy where we can hold our own.

Islington Council is dedicated to promoting and championing the London Living Wage and 'good work' for local people and those working within the borough. This report and research were commissioned to assess the evidence and focus on the areas where change is most needed. In collaboration with local partners, we would like to use the research, report, and recommendations to tackle the issues highlighted.

Santiago Bell-Bradford

Executive Member for Inclusive Economy, Jobs, and Culture

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report explores experiences of work and the potential for union renewal in the London Borough of Islington (LBI). It emerged out of a series of roundtables on ‘good work’ in 2021, convened by Islington Council and the Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement ([CAPE](#)) project. Those roundtables identified declining union membership as a key factor contributing to the increase in seven specific ‘work-based’ harms: low pay, lack of statutory entitlements, poor health and safety, contractual insecurity, discrimination, absence of worker voice, and welfare conditionality.

Declining union membership is important because of the associations between unionisation and good terms and conditions (the union ‘wage premium’, safer workplaces, equality and diversity, and a better work-life balance), as we explore in [section 1.3](#). It is therefore particularly concerning that rates of unionisation are lowest in the lowest paid, most precarious occupations, and amongst minoritised ethnicities and those from a migrant background.

Understanding the challenges facing unions, along with best practice for unions engaging so-called ‘difficult-to-organise’ groups of workers, is crucial. We also consider the idea of ‘community unionism’ (in [section 1.4](#)), where unions and communities collaborate to promote good work, as a potential strategy to revitalise the trade union movement and open-it up to addressing broader community concerns.

This report is underpinned by exploratory research designed to investigate these issues by mapping the distribution of work-based harms in Islington, understanding the barriers to unionisation, and exploring local authority policy levers to address the situation.

Part 2: What does Islington's Labour Market Look Like?

In **Part 2** of the report, we examine Islington's labour market, with particular reference to the seven work-based harms, which we examine through available statistical data and existing research. **Section 2.1** discusses the limitations of national statistics at the local authority level. **Section 2.2** outlines the Islington context, noting the significant cross-border commuting and contrasting the high concentration of professional roles with pockets of deprivation and growth in low-paying sectors.

In **sections 2.3 to 2.9** we then explore the seven work-based harms in detail. We note the following:

Harm	Indicators	Coverage	Data	Reliability ¹
1. National Minimum Wage Violations, Unpaid Wages and Low Pay	Approx. 3,500 residents & 4,200 workers paid at the National Minimum Wage	Islington	LPC estimates (ASHE) (2023)	Good
	Approx. 1,000 residents & 1,000 workers each are likely to be paid under the NMW	Islington	Extrapolated from national data (ASHE) (2023)	Low confidence
	Low pay (regional measure) is relatively high for men (16%) & women (21%) & very high in particular industries (women = 45%, men = 36%, in hospitality)	Greater London	Aggregated LFS data (2018 & 2021)	Fair
2. Lack of Statutory Entitlements	Approx. 3,800 residents have no paid holiday entitlement (last 12 months)	Islington	Extrapolated from national (LFS) figures (2022)	Low confidence
	Approx. 6,200 residents likely to have been ill but unable to access sick pay (last 12 months)	Islington	Extrapolated from DWP survey (2021)	Low confidence

1 The reliability of the statistics featured here are open to interpretation. However, we have made judgements on basis of how recently surveys were conducted, their sample size (especially at lower levels of geography), whether trend data is available and taking into account the increasing problems with national surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (see for example, ONS (2023) 'Labour Force Survey: planned improvements and its reintroduction', <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyplannedimprovementsanditsreintroduction>). Where we have extrapolated from national survey data these estimates have the lowest levels of confidence and provide further methodological detail in Appendix 6.1.



Harm	Indicators	Coverage	Data	Reliability ¹
3. Health and Safety	Islington = fewer reportable injuries (147 per 100k people) than London (156) or England (212), but more than Inner London (129)	Islington, London, England	RIDDOR (2022/23)	Good
	Reportable injuries are higher in hospitality (260 per 100k people) & health/social care (259) than all industries average (215)	GB	RIDDOR (2022/23)	Good
	Self-reported stress, depression & anxiety due to work is higher in Greater London (2,690 per 100k) than England (2,570)	London, England	LFS aggregate (2020-2023)	Good
4. Employment Insecurity and Dependent Self-Employment	Small number of Islington residents on ZHCs (2%), but very high in some sectors (health/social care = 18%, hospitality = 27%)	Islington, UK	LFS (2021) and LFS (2023)	Low confidence for Islington, good for the UK
	Very high levels of female part-time working in hospitality (52%), retail (44%), health/social care (36%) & business support (36%)	London	BRES & LFS (2023)	Fair
	2,100 residents likely to be subject to 'bogus' self-employment	Islington	Extrapolated from national CA data (2015)	Low confidence
5. Discrimination and Harassment	Median gender pay gaps for Islington residents (6.4%) & workers (10.1%) are lower than for Greater London (12.2%) & UK (15.2%) residents	Islington, London, UK	5-year averages of ASHE (2019-2023)	Good
	Workplace sexual harassment is higher in London (35%) than the British average (29%) & higher in hospitality (40%) than other sectors	Regions, GB	ComRes survey (2017)	Fair
	Black British (55%) & Pakistanis/Bangladeshis (47%) have lower employment rates in Islington compared to other ethnicities (White = 81%) & London & UK averages	Islington, London, UK	LFS 5-year averages (2018-2022)	Good

Harm	Indicators	Coverage	Data	Reliability ¹
6. Absence of Worker Voice	Union density is low in the borough (18%)	Islington	WISERD estimates (2000-2021 average)	Fair
	Collective agreement coverage in Islington (29%) is lower than the average for Inner London (32%), Greater London (34%) & the UK (41%)	Islington, London, UK	WISERD estimates & LFS	Fair
	Islington is estimated to have had the 11th worst rate of decline amongst 406 local authorities	Islington, Local Authorities	WISERD estimates (2000/10 -2011/21)	Fair
7. Impacts of Welfare Conditionality	Islington has a slightly higher unemployment rate (5%) than the British average (3.7%)	Islington, GB	LFS (2023)	Fair
	18,516 residents claiming out-of-work Universal Credit (UC), 8,705 claiming in-work UC, & 7,622 claiming Employment & Support Allowance	Islington	Claimant Count (2024)	Good

Part 3: How does the Council Partner with Unions to Promote Good Work?

In **Part 3** we explore the role of unions in the borough, including the way the Council works with unions, union perspectives on work-based harms, challenges around unionisation and the role of Islington Trades Union Council. This is based on findings from interviews with 24 union officials and lay representatives, including 21 from nine TUC-affiliated unions (TSSA, Unite, UCU, CWU, RMT, Unison, NEU, GMB, Usdaw), two from ‘independent’ unions (IWGB and ACORN), and one from Organise Now!.

In **section 3.2** we explore union perspectives on working with Islington Council. Islington Council has a strong track record of passing motions supporting workers’ rights. The Council partnered with the TUC during the pandemic to promote a safe return to work and is now promoting the community union ACORN to residents facing issues with private landlords. Unions appreciate such progress, but seek further action on in-sourcing, the promotion of initiatives like Unite’s Fair Hospitality Charter, as well as increased local enforcement activity. A number of unions believed the Council has a key role to play in terms of educating residents on employment rights and trade unions.



Section 3.3 details union perspectives on the seven work-based harms introduced above. While there is a degree of overlap with **Part 2**, key findings include:

1. **London Living Wage:** Often subsumes other wage benefits and workers struggle to meet high local living costs.
2. **Health and Safety:** Concerns include workplace violence for retail workers and unsafe conditions for couriers.
3. **Insecure Contracts:** Issues extend beyond zero-hour contracts (ZHCs) to include ‘umbrella contracts’ and erratic changes in work hours.
4. **Discrimination:** Disproportionate impact on minoritised ethnicities facing the worst work conditions, women facing sexual and street harassment.

In **section 3.4** we briefly note examples of union success stories in and around Islington on issues of pay, union recognition and tackling insecure contracts. However, barriers to unionisation remain steep, and we explore these in some detail in **section 3.5**. They include the following:

- i. Large workplaces can be difficult to organise because of the ease of replacing workers, while in small workplaces workers can be subject to high levels of surveillance
- ii. High turnover is one of the greatest challenges to organising, and is partially a consequence of the high living costs in Inner London
- iii. Unions lack access to workplaces and there are high levels of fear amongst vulnerable workers (migrants, those on insecure contracts)
- iv. Lack of knowledge of unions is also a barrier, fewer and fewer people have family or social connections to unionised workers
- v. Unionisation is never easy or straightforward, and therefore requires high levels of engagement, which can be resource intensive
- vi. Language barriers can be an issue, in the absence of multilingual organisers and translated materials (cultural knowledge/sensitivity can also be an issue)
- vii. Given the decline in union strength, the resources necessary for organising campaigns can be lacking

In **section 3.6** we explore a number of initiatives in and around Islington that have been engaging with so-called ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers. **Unite’s Migrant Workers Branch** grew out of links with a Turkish and Kurdish community centre and grew through street-based outreach activities and offering training sessions in the community. The **United Migrant Workers Education Project offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** and other training to cleaners and domestic workers in central London, also serving as a place to secure advice and representation. The Unite campaign at the famous queer venue the **Dalston Superstore** is an important case study for organising in the night-time economy and securing wins on safe transport options home for late night workers.

The **IWGB** meanwhile have built up a track record of organising precarious and migrant workers. They have built the union through engagement events, community training, translating materials and providing a bilingual legal team. Following the murder of Takieddine Boudhane in Islington in 2020 they embarked on a partnership with Islington Council, leading to important successes (**advice provision, community building and dedicated courier parking at Highbury Corner**).

Finally in [section 3.7](#) we consider [Islington Trades Union Council](#) as a key mechanism for cross-union collaboration, though challenges remain around income, volunteer numbers, and expanding affiliations. Trades council delegates expressed interest in doing more outreach work in the community, potentially linking with unionfinder and Organise Now! to signpost unorganised workers into unions. Delegates are also particularly interested in campaigning around hospitality, a key sector in Islington (both culturally and economically).

Part 4: What are Islington Council's Policy Levers to Promote Good Work?

Part 4 of the report explores how Islington Council can use engagement opportunities and policy tools to promote good work. We begin by addressing the challenges posed by local government austerity and, in [Section 4.2](#), examine how local 'Good Work Charters' have emerged to fill gaps in national employment regulation. We explore the limitations of these charters in terms of a failure to identify what 'bad work' looks like, and their limited uptake by employers. Ultimately, we argue that they can be useful in defining and promoting good work, but they must be backed up by credible monitoring, enforcement, and a wider movement campaigning for change.

In [section 4.3](#) we take a deeper look at Islington Council's [Progressive Procurement Strategy](#) and how it links to existing charters against modern slavery and violence in the workplace. We then focus in on the Council's homecare procurement strategy and the progress made against Unison's Ethical Care Charter.

Section 4.4 looks at employment rights advice provision in Islington. We highlight key council services such as [advice hubs](#), [income maximisation team](#), [family information service](#), [housing advice](#) and [iWork](#), alongside third sector organisations such as [Islington Law Centre](#), [Islington Bamer Advice Alliance](#) and [City Community Legal Advice Centre](#), which are either overstretched or have withdrawn from employment advice altogether.

We also discuss [Citizens Advice Islington](#) (CAI) and their [Employment Law Advice Service](#) (ELAS), offered in conjunction with the RCJ Advice - Citizens Advice and Law Centre. We highlight the important role of ELAS as the most significant employment advice service in the borough but note that diminishing resources have led to cuts to service provision in recent years and as of November 2024 the project's funding has not been renewed. This informs a discussion of the [Newham Employment Rights Hub](#) as a potential model for Islington to expand employment rights support.

In [section 4.5](#), we examine at the wider landscape of community engagement around employment rights, suggesting that both [Adult and Community Learning](#) (ACL) and [Personal, Social, Health and Economic](#) (PSHE) education could both be important mechanisms for increasing public understandings of employment rights. We also consider the benefit of potential collaborations with third sector organisations like [Cripplegate Foundation](#) and local wellbeing networks.

Section 4.6 covers childcare provision in Islington, and highlights poor working conditions, recruitment challenges, and the impact on single parents who struggle to access flexible working. Further research on flexible working in Islington is needed, and the Council should engage unions and stakeholders to promote good work in this sector.

Finally, in [section 4.7](#) we explore how the Mayor's night-time economy strategy provides an opportunity to promote good work principles. This strategy can link to Islington's community wealth building, cultural, and violence reduction initiatives, while using licensing and anti-harassment efforts to foster good working conditions and unionisation campaigns.

In the recommendations which follow we attempt to show how these above findings can be implemented by the various stakeholders in Islington (Islington Council, the trade unions, third sector and researchers).

Recommendations

Actor(s)	Recommendation	Rationale	Timeline, Resourcing & Implementation
Islington Council	1. Promote TUC 'join a union' & Organise Now! via council channels	Council already promotes ACORN to private renters	- 6 months - Staff time to liaise with TUC & Organise Now! & update webpages
	2. Develop a community unionism campaign to promote employment rights	Need to better promote unions in the borough	- 12-24 months - Establish a working group with TUC, ITUC, unions & 3rd sector to develop materials - Officer support
	3. Improve education around employment rights	Lack of public understanding of employment rights & unions	- 12-months - Staff time to develop materials (ACL, PSHE)
	4. Advocating for the cross-cutting nature of the promotion of good work	Entails local policy on poverty, inequality, regeneration, planning, families and more	- Ongoing - Integrating the work of Council departments (from family information team to procurement)
	5. Continue to build on the Progressive Procurement Strategy, making reference to a definition of 'good work'	There is a need to define high quality work via the GLA Good Work Standard or similar	- 12-24 months - Council to agree definition to be inserted into procurement process
	6. Advocate for investment in employment rights advice provision	Services are overstretched & demand is unmet	- 12-24 months - approx. £200k
	7. Promote good work in the Night-Time Economy through Pathfinder Projects	Significance of local NTE & high levels of work-based harms	- 12 months - Staff time for policy development & liaison with relevant unions
	8. Develop a project to target vulnerable workers in association with IWGB	Blackstock Rd Project benefitted vulnerable workers	- 12 months - Approx £40k
	9. Work with unions to promote good work in the childcare sector	Need to improve recruitment & retention	- 12-24 months - Coordinate with unions (Unison, NEU, UUV)
	10. Scale up promotion of good work through CLF & GLA	Need to work across boroughs (high levels of commuting)	- 12-24 months



Actor(s)	Recommendation	Rationale	Timeline, Resourcing & Implementation
Unions	11. Draw on best practice for engaging with so-called 'difficult to-organise' workers	Need to improve rates of unionisation	- Ongoing - Investment in organisers & campaigning
	12. Regional unions to encourage branches to affiliate to ITUC	Strengthens networks & resources	- 0-24 months - National TUC work with union Regional Offices
	13. National TUC to develop capacity in local Trades Union Councils & refresh 'join a union' initiative	A need to think strategically on improving capacity in Trades Councils	- 12-24 months - National TUC to consult with unions & Trades Councils
	14. Islington TUC to work with the national TUC & Organise Now! to promote unions to unorganised workers	Unionfinder & Organise Now! tools can improve the efficiency of outreach work	- 0-24 months - ITUC to liaise with national TUC & Organise Now! - design of relevant materials & volunteer coordination
	15. Increase the profile of ITUC through a borough-wide campaign	Unionisation & increases ITUC capacity	- 0-24 months - Work with relevant sectoral unions
	16. Unions to improve internal training on welfare reform	Union members are increasingly subject to conditionality	- 0-24 months - Liaise with national Unite Community (Brett Sparks)
Community & Volunteer Sector	17. Promoting collaborative design in advice provision	Need to improve coordination between different advice service providers	- 0-24 months - Voluntary Action Islington to liaise with members
	18. Develop training materials for CVS sector	Improve/standardise information on employment rights	- 0-12 months - CVS organisations to liaise with Council and unions
	19. Marx Memorial Library continue to promote education on employment rights	Maximise potential of this nationally significant resource	- 0-24 months - Islington Council to facilitate greater links between schools, community & MML
Research	20. Local surveys on the distribution of work-based harms	Variable quality of existing datasets affects the reliability of local estimates	- 0-24 months - Explore the potential use of the MOPAC survey to explore work-based harms
	21. Local survey on the availability of flexible working in the borough	Lack of local data on the issue	- 12-24 months
	22. Replicate this research on a wider spatial scale	Due to high levels of cross-border commuting	- 0-24 months - Research collaborations via CLF
	23. Further explore the potential for a community unionism campaign	Understand issues of capacity & priorities for partners	- 0-24 months - Engaging with unions, 3rd sector, anchor institutions & businesses

1. Part 1: Introduction

Part 1 provides background and introduces the project.

- **Section 1.1 explains how this research developed** out of CAPE roundtable events with Islington Council, focusing on labour market polarisation, the growth of low paid, precarious and poor-quality jobs, and the need to promote good work.
- **Section 1.2 introduces the framework of ‘work-based harms’** as a way of identifying specific problems with the quality of work that impact people financially, physically, psychologically and socially.
- In this report we focus on the following seven harms: 1) National Minimum Wage Violations, Unpaid Wages and Low Pay, 2) Lack of Statutory Entitlements, 3) Health and Safety, 4) Employment Insecurity and Dependent Self-Employment, 5) Discrimination and Harassment, 6) Absence of Worker Voice, 7) Impacts of Welfare Conditionality.
- **In section 1.3 we explain why trade unions are critical to promoting good work**, given that unionised jobs are better jobs.
- **In section 1.4 we discuss how coalitions between communities and unions can be a force for promoting good work** (‘community unionism’).

1.1. Introduction and Background

As of July 2024, a new Labour Government is in power, committed as part of their 2024 Manifesto² to ending unfair ways of working (e.g. Zero Hour Contracts), introducing basic day one employment rights (e.g. sick pay and parental leave), and ensuring fair wages that people can live on. The aspirations contained within that Manifesto reflect rising concerns around ‘good’ or ‘decent’ work over the last decade, highlighted in the 2017 Taylor Review³. The UK labour market has become increasingly polarised, with jobs divided into high-quality, secure positions and poorly paid, precarious roles.

This growing awareness of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ jobs has led to initiatives from devolved and local authorities to promote ‘good work’. Among these efforts, “Good Work Charters”, adopted by city regions, stand out. We examine these in **Part 4** in this report. This agenda is also key to the development of this research project, which aims to move beyond headline descriptors of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ work, focusing instead on the distribution of ‘work-based harms’ in the London Borough of Islington (LBI). These harms refer to the ways in which workers can be negatively affected – financially, physically, psychologically and socially – by poorly paid and precarious work, with poor terms and conditions.

² <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-MANIFESTO-UK-2024.pdf>

³ Taylor M (2017) *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*. London: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The research emerged out of a series of roundtables on ‘Good Work’ supported by Islington Council and the Research England Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) project⁴. The first roundtable held in July 2021 explored concepts around good work and inclusive economies, focusing on how a significant minority of both Islington’s residents and workforce were undertaking low paid and insecure jobs. A lack of mid-tier, skilled and secure jobs with good prospects for advancement mean that Islington’s labour market has been described as a ‘hourglass’, with some of the highest rates of pay in London sitting alongside some of the highest rates of inequality. Discussions tied into Islington Council’s corporate plan to reduce long-term unemployment, support skill development, create an inclusive economy, and help residents cope with the rising cost of living.

At that meeting the organising model behind [Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise](#), and the research underpinning that campaign⁵ was raised as a potential example for Islington of how a grassroots campaign could attempt to raise the profile of debates around work quality. A second roundtable, in September 2021, included presentations on the [Greater Manchester Combined Authority’s \(GMCA\) Good Employment Charter](#) which highlighted the challenges of getting hospitality and retail businesses signed up to forms of accreditation around good work. The Greater London Authority (GLA) Good Work Standards was also covered. This includes commitments for gig workers, a living wage campaign and sector specific campaigns (such as in the fashion industry). One challenge that was identified included the difficulties of cross-borough working, given the very high levels of cross-border commuting, which means there is a clear logic to working at a regional level. A further challenge is the lack of enforcement powers around work and employment for the London Mayor.

Two of the authors of this report, [Dr Bob Jeffery](#) and [Prof David Etherington](#), presenting on their work in Sheffield, noted the need for local data on the distribution of poor or exploitative work and the importance of workplace unionisation in promoting good-quality jobs. The latter is critical, given the well-evidenced associations between collective bargaining and good quality work (see Section 1.3 below). Part of the reason for low levels of unionisation is a lack of capacity within the trade union movement to take on all of the unorganised sectors that now exist. Indeed, the main reason people are not members of unions is that they have never been asked to join⁶. Dr Jeffery argued that there was therefore a role for local grassroots organisation to increase capacity in relation to trade unions. This is sometimes described as ‘community unionism’, a term we explore below (section 1.4). Prof Etherington highlighted the council’s important role in ‘union renewal’, by raising the public profile of trade unions, encouraging council workers to join a union, engaging young people and using unions to monitor contract compliance and support workers facing welfare conditionality (given the link between being a claimant and being exposed to poor quality work).

4 <https://www.cape.ac.uk/>

5 Thomas P Etherington D Jeffery B Beresford R Beel D & Jones M (2020) *Tackling Labour Market Injustice and Organising Workers: The View from a Northern Heartland*, Sheffield TUC.

6 Tailby S and Pollert A (2011) ‘Non-unionized young workers and organizing the unorganized’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol 32(3) p. 504.



These roundtable discussions served to inform the co-design of a research brief, and [CAPE policy Challenge project](#), which focused on four priorities:

- Sketching out the labour market characteristics of LBI
- Mapping the distribution of work-based harms in LBI
- Understanding the barriers to unionisation in LBI
- Identifying Islington Council (IC) policy levers to address good work

Though the idea of building a community unionism campaign was considered beyond the scope of this project, this report seeks to lay the groundwork for future action in that area.

1.2. The Framework of Work-Based Harms

There are a variety of terms in use that link to the debates around job quality. Different authors speak of ‘good’, ‘decent’, ‘fair’, ‘precarious’, ‘vulnerable’ and ‘exploitative’ work or use terms like ‘labour abuses’ and the ‘denial of employment rights’. All of these terms tie into what we have described above as a polarisation in job quality, with the growth of high-skilled, varied, well-paid and secure work on the one hand, but also low-skilled or unskilled, repetitive, poorly paid and insecure work on the other. Goos and Manning starkly illustrate this divide when they refer to the division between ‘lousy and lovely jobs’⁷.

However, these terms often focus on a single aspect of job quality and ignore other perspectives. For example, whilst the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) conventions on ‘decent work’ centre on the elimination of forced and child labour⁸, this is not necessarily typical of the most widespread and routine labour abuses experienced by workers at the bottom end of the labour market in the UK in 2024. Similarly, ‘precarious work’ as a term captures a sense of the insecurity that many workers feel, but at the same time, not all contractually flexible work is poor quality work, and not all poor-quality work is contractually insecure⁹.

7 Goos M and Manning A (2007) ‘Lousy and Lovely Jobs: The Rising Polarization of Work in Britain’, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 89(1), pp. 118-133.

8 Scott S (2018) *Labour Exploitation and Work-Based Harm*, Bristol: Policy Press, p. 162-3.

9 Jeffery B Etherington D Ledger-Jessop B Jones M & Thomas P (2024) ‘Exposure to Harm as a Function of Bargaining Position: The Class Composition of Hospitality Workers in Sheffield’, *Capital & Class*.

We therefore prefer to use the term ‘work-based harms’, which is more sensitive to the different ways terms and conditions of employment can negatively affect workers. The term looks beyond legal definitions of acceptable work (i.e. violations of employment law), recognising that many harmful practices are rarely criminalised or actively investigated. Work-based harms centre on negative aspects of work that impact upon people in four ways: **financially** (poverty and the inability to make ends meet), **physically** (physical injury linked to working conditions and potentially entailing a lack of support when struggling with ill health), **psychologically** (in terms of stress, depression, and anxiety, but also entailing discrimination, harassment and bullying) and **socially** (impacting upon people’s social status and potential for growth and development)¹⁰. In linking these four different kinds of harm to common aspects of work and taking into account relevant legislation and policy, in this report we explore harm under the following seven headings:

1. **National Minimum Wage Violations, Unpaid Wages and Low Pay**
2. **Lack of Statutory Entitlements**
3. **Health and Safety**
4. **Employment Insecurity and Dependent Self-Employment**
5. **Discrimination and Harassment**
6. **Absence of Worker Voice**
7. **Impacts of Welfare Conditionality**

1.3. The Focus on Union Renewal

Unionised jobs are known to be better jobs. The most obvious example of this is the union ‘wage premium’, the higher rates of pay that union members earn relative to non-members – 3.2% as of 2022¹¹. But the benefits extend far beyond this premium and include safer workplaces with lower rates of injury and illness¹², a greater likelihood of workplace equal opportunities policies and practices¹³, lower gender pay gaps¹⁴, and a greater likelihood of policies promoting work-life balance¹⁵, amongst other benefits.

However, union membership has been declining for decades in the UK, particularly in industries like the arts, retail, and hospitality, where union density is significantly lower than in sectors like transport or education. For example, membership density in 2021 was 14% in ‘arts, entertainment and recreation’, 12.1% in ‘wholesale and retail trade’, 8.6% in ‘administrative and support service activities’, and 3.4% of ‘accommodation and food services’ compared rates of 35-50% in ‘transport and storage’, ‘public administration’, ‘education’ and ‘human health and social work’¹⁶.

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- 10 Canning V Tombs S (2021) *From Social Harm to Zemiology: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford and New York: Routledge, p. 66; Jeffery et al (2024).
- 11 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2022) Trade Union Statistics 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2022>
- 12 TUC (2016) *The Union Effect: How unions make a difference to health and safety*, London: Trade Union Congress, https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Union%20effect%202015%20%28pdf%29_0.pdf
- 13 Hoque K and Bacon N (2014) ‘Unions, joint regulation and workplace equality policy and practice in Britain: evidence from the 2004 WERS’, *Work, Employment and Society*, 28(2), 1–20.
- 14 GEO (2010) *The Gender Pay Gap in the UK: 1995 to 2007*, London: Government Equalities Office, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100210210201mp_/http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/GPAYGAP_gpg_summary_FINAL.pdf
- 15 TUC (2017) *Work/life balance and trade unions: Evidence from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011*, London: Trade Union Congress, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/4%20WERS%20WLB%20new%20format%20main%20plus%20appendix.pdf>
- 16 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (2022) *Trade Union Statistics 2022* (available at - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2022> - accessed 30/05/2023).



The decline in unionisation is extremely concerning and is a key explanation for the proliferation of poor-quality work.

The reasons for low levels of unionisation in many service industries range from the prevalence of smaller and more fragmented worksites, internal divisions between departments, a younger workforce, higher staff turnover, insecure contracts, to the lack of skill specificity that would contribute to a stronger bargaining position¹⁷. For all these reasons unions consider workers in a number of service industries to be ‘difficult-to-organise’ or ‘costly-to-organise’¹⁸ and in the context of the general decline in trade union membership, unions have tended to focus on the ‘low hanging fruit’ of increasing density where they already have a significant membership¹⁹, in their strongholds in transportation and the public sector.

Moreover, and linking to the ways in which different groups are more or less exposed to work-based harms, unionisation also varies by demographics. Women are more likely to be trade union members than men (25.6% compared to 19.1% in 2022²⁰), but they remain underrepresented amongst paid officials and senior workplace representatives²¹. The greatest losses in union membership in the year to May 2022 have also been amongst women²² and this could be related to the disproportionately gendered impacts of the pandemic.

Trade union membership is also highest amongst White British and Black British ethnicities (23.3% and 22.8% respectively) while it is lower among those of Chinese or Other (13.5%), Asian British (14.2%) and Mixed (14.8%) ethnicities. For instance, a 2022 study of Kurdish and Turkish migrant workers in north London found union membership to be just 3.2%²³. In regional terms, London has the lowest levels of union membership (at 17.1%), especially compared to the likes of Yorkshire and the Humber (26.1%)²⁴.

Declining union membership and deteriorating job quality are closely linked, making union renewal essential for promoting good work. **Our research emphasises the need for the revival of trade unionism, or ‘union renewal’, recognising it as key to improving job quality beyond national legislation and local policy measures. It is this perspective that distinguishes our approach.** That said, encouragingly, other bodies, such as the Royal Society of Arts²⁵, are beginning to wake up to the necessity of promoting union revitalisation in the UK.

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- 17 Moore S Jefferys S Cours-Salies P (2007) ‘Why do Europe’s unions find it difficult to organise in small firms?’, *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, vol. 13(1): 115-130; Wills J (2005) ‘The Geography of Union Organising in Low-Paid Service Industries in the UK: Lessons from the T&G’s Campaign to Unionise the Dorchester Hotel, London’, *Antipode*, vol 37(1) pp. 139-159; Tailby S and Pollert A (2011) ‘Non-unionized young workers and organizing the unorganized’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 32(3): 499-522; Royle T (1999) ‘Recruiting the acquiescent workforce: a comparative analysis of McDonald’s in German and the UK’, *Employee Relations*, vol. 2(6): 540-555; Wood A (2020a) *Discipline on Demand: How Power Operates in the Flexible Workplace*, New York: Cornell University Press; Wood A (2020b) ‘Beyond mobilisation at McDonald’s: Towards networked organising’, *Capital & Class*, vol. 44(4): 493-502.
- 18 Tailby and Pollert (2011), p. 500.
- 19 Etherington D Jeffery B Thomas P Jones M and Ledger-Jessop B (2023) ‘Trade union strategies to tackle labour market insecurity: Geography and the role of Sheffield TUC’, *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 54(3): 261-277.
- 20 BEIS (2022).
- 21 Healy G and Kirton G (2000) ‘Women, Power and Trade Union Government in the UK’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 38(3), p. 357; Kirton G (2021) ‘Union framing of gender equality and the elusive potential of equality bargaining in a difficult climate’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 63(4), p. 594.
- 22 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (2023) Trade Union Membership UK 1995-2022 Statistical Bulletin, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2022>, p. 8.
- 23 GIK-DER UK (2022) *Perspectives of migrant workers from Turkey in London’s labour markets*, https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Perspectives_of_migrant_workers_in_Turkey_on_Londons_labour_markets.pdf, p.17.
- 24 BEIS (2023), p. 21.
- 25 Lockley A and Wallace-Stephens (2020) *A blueprint for good work: Eight ideas for a new social contract*, London: RSA.



1.4. The Lessons from Community Unionism

Given the challenges of union organising in many service sectors, identified in the previous section, the concept of ‘community unionism’ has been gaining increasing traction in recent years. This refers to efforts by unions to build community coalitions to help promote unionisation, collective bargaining and good work. This is partially about bringing additional resources into the trade union movement, but also about unions opening themselves up to the concerns of diverse communities.

In some ways this can be conceived as a return to the origins of the trade union movement, when workers’ associations were strongly rooted in the communities and localities out of which they developed²⁶. Those communities provided practical resources and political leverage to support the growth of union organisations. However, the connections have weakened over time due to factors such as declining union membership, deindustrialisation, increased residential mobility, and changes in both political discourse and the definition of community²⁷.

Building community coalitions to support union revitalisation and promote ‘good work’ presents challenges. These range from identifying and engaging with local communities, building campaigns, and managing relationships among diverse actors. Tensions may arise, for instance, between unions, which often take an adversarial stance against employers, and community groups, which may prefer more conciliatory approaches²⁸.

An example of a highly successful community unionism campaign that balanced this tension is the London Citizens organisation, which has engaged in advocacy to persuade employers to sign up to the ‘Real’ Living Wage. London Citizens built a community coalition composed of faith communities, schools, universities and union branches and in its first decade secured pay increases worth £70 million²⁹.

Another model is Action for Rail, a coalition of the major railway unions (TSSA, RMT, ASLEF and Unite) and transport consumer groups (Bring Back British Rail, Disability Back-Up, Campaign for Better Transport, etc), campaigning on above inflation fare increases, service quality and station staffing³⁰. The GMB has experimented with engaging migrant workers by offering language lessons, though this raised issues around union density across scattered workplaces, creating resourcing issues for the GMB in trying to service members³¹. Unite meanwhile opened a ‘community membership’ in 2011, welcoming students, retirees and unemployed individuals into the union. While expanding the focus of the trade union, such as into the impact of benefits cuts³², tensions emerged over how fully integrated the new members were into the union’s structures³³.

Though developing a full community unionism campaign for Islington is beyond the scope of this report, this research aims to lay the groundwork for such an initiative by comprehensively mapping work-based harms, union activity and challenges in the borough, the range of Local Authority (LA) and third sector activity around employment issues, and available policy levers to promote good work.

26 Chase M (2000) *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

27 Jeffery B Thomas P & Devine D (2020) ‘Classificatory struggles in the midst of austerity: policing or politics?’, *The Sociological Review*, vol. 68(1): 127-143.

28 Holgate J (2015) ‘Community organising in the UK: A “new” approach for trade unions’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 36(3): 431-455.

29 Holgate J (2015).

30 Holgate (2015).

31 James P and Karmowska J (2016) ‘British union renewal: does salvation really lie beyond the workplace?’, *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol 47(2): 102-116.

32 Holgate (2015); Etherington D Jeffery B Thomas P Jones M and Ledger-Jessop B (2023) ‘Trade union strategies to tackle labour market insecurity: Geography and the role of Sheffield TUC’, *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 54(3): 261-277.

33 Holgate J (2021) ‘Trade unions in the community: building broad spaces of solidarity’, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 42(2): 226-247.

1.5. Structure of the Report

Part 2: What does Islington's Labour Market Look Like?, examines key issues relating to the Islington labour market, while noting the methodological limitations of existing data sources. We provide a demographic overview and occupational and sectoral profile of the borough. We then attempt to map employment issues for LBI under seven categories: 1) minimum wage violations, unpaid work and low pay; 2) lack of statutory entitlements; 3) health and safety; 4) employment insecurity and dependent self-employment; 5) discrimination and harassment; 6) absence of worker voice; and 7) impacts of welfare conditionality.

Part 3: How does the Council Partner with Unions to Promote Good Work?, explores the opportunities for the LA to increase activities with trade unions to promote good work. We provide an overview of union perspectives on Islington Council, noting best practice and areas of possible development. We then examine unions' perspectives on work-based harms, going beyond the largely statistical overview in **Part 2** to explore industries, workplaces and the mechanisms that generate harm. We then briefly review examples of union success stories in the borough, but also analyse the challenges around unionisation and consider important case studies where those challenges have been partially overcome. We conclude by examining the Trades Council's role in promoting good work.

Part 4: What are Islington Council's Policy Levers to Promote Good Work?, builds on our analysis of the opportunities of greater partnership working with trade unions and considers a broad range of policy levers available to the council to promote good work. We examine the value of Good Work Charters, describing their features and limitations. We then document the Council's Progressive Procurement Strategy, its functioning and the scope for further development. We enumerate the landscape of employment advice services and examine the challenges they are facing, looking to what could be learned from Newham Council's investment in an Employment Rights Hub. This section also explores possible contributions from Adult and Community Learning (ACL), Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, the Community and Volunteer Sector (CVS) and Marx Memorial Library (MML). Finally, we consider challenges around childcare provision and the opportunity to use a night-time economy strategy to promote good work.

We conclude the report by way of a number of recommendations pitched at the LA, trade unions, the community and volunteer sector and research community.

2. Part 2: What does Islington's Labour Market Look Like?

Part 2 explores Islington's labour market.

- **Section 2.1 details our methodology** and notes data limitations.
- **Section 2.2 introduces the Islington context**, the demographics of the borough and the rather different profiles of residents, compared to jobs in the borough.
- **Section 2.3 focuses on minimum wage violations and low pay**; low pay affects a significant minority (particularly by the regional measure) and is high in certain key industries in London.
- **Section 2.4 looks at a lack of statutory entitlements** - while estimates are low confidence, many thousands of Islington residents are likely to lack access to paid holidays and sick pay.
- **Section 2.5 examines health and safety** - reportable injuries are lower in Islington than regionally and nationally, but there are concerns around certain industries. Existing evidence flags concerns around the working conditions of particular migrant groups and minoritised ethnicities.
- **Section 2.6 investigates the prevalence of insecure contracts** (including 'dependent' or 'bogus' self-employment). The number of residents on ZHCs is low, but we know Islington hosts a substantial number of jobs in industries where ZHCs are common. Part-time working is also very high in certain industries, particularly for women. Estimates of dependent self-employment are low confidence but suggest a couple of thousand Islington residents could be affected.
- **Section 2.7 explores issues of discrimination and harassment.** Gender pay gaps are relatively low in Islington, but workplace sexual harassment is high across London as a whole. Particular minoritised ethnicities in the borough have lower levels of employment and across London face lower rates of pay.
- **Section 2.8 looks at union membership in the borough**, using experimental statistics. The analysis suggests that Islington has one of the lowest rates of union density of any LA and has experienced one of the sharpest rates of decline in the last twenty years.
- **Section 2.9 examines unemployment and the impacts of welfare conditionality.** Islington has a slightly higher rate of unemployment than the national average. Just under 20,000 resident claim out-of-work benefits and just under 9,000 are subject to in-work conditionality. Conditionality disproportionately affects women, disabled and ethnically minoritised residents.

2.1. Introduction and Methods

In this part of the report we explore Islington's labour market, with a particular focus on the prevalence of work-based harms. More specifically we focus on harms that can be grouped under seven headings: unpaid wages and low pay; lack of statutory entitlements; health and safety (physical and mental health harms); employment insecurity and dependent self-employment; discrimination and harassment; absence of worker voice and impacts of welfare conditionality.

Although in many instances data limitations - particularly at the level of the LA - restrict our analysis, we utilise the best publicly available datasets, including the Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey³⁴, the Business Register and Employment Survey³⁵, and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings³⁶. In some instances, we have used aggregated data and rolling averages to mitigate the effect of small sample sizes at the LA level. Whenever there is a higher level of uncertainty attached to a statistical estimate, we have made this clear. Further information on our methodology can be found in Appendix 6.1.

Additionally, we have undertaken an extensive review of the literature on work-based harms in Islington, Greater London and (to a lesser extent) the wider UK. We only provide a summary of the critical findings in this report, but further information is available on request.

2.2. The Islington Context

Previous studies highlight the very high levels of cross-border commuting in the borough, with only a fifth of residents working in LBI as of 2018, and almost nine tenths of jobs being filled by workers from outside the borough³⁷. Clearly, Islington Council has obligations to both, but residents and workers are not the same group of people, and wherever possible in the subsequent analyses we provide information on both groups separately.

Islington has a population of 216,600, having increased by 5.1% between the 2011 and 2021 censuses³⁸. Over the same period, the age profile of its residents has increased slightly, particularly amongst those residents aged 50–64-year-olds, with small decreases in those who are younger. Ethnically diverse, 62% of residents identify as White (down from 68% in 2011), though this is higher than the London average³⁹. In terms of linguistic diversity, Italian, and Turkish speakers account for around 2% each, with other languages like Somali, Portuguese, Bengali, Greek and Arabic accounting for around 1% each⁴⁰.

34 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/aps>

35 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/bres>

36 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/ashe>

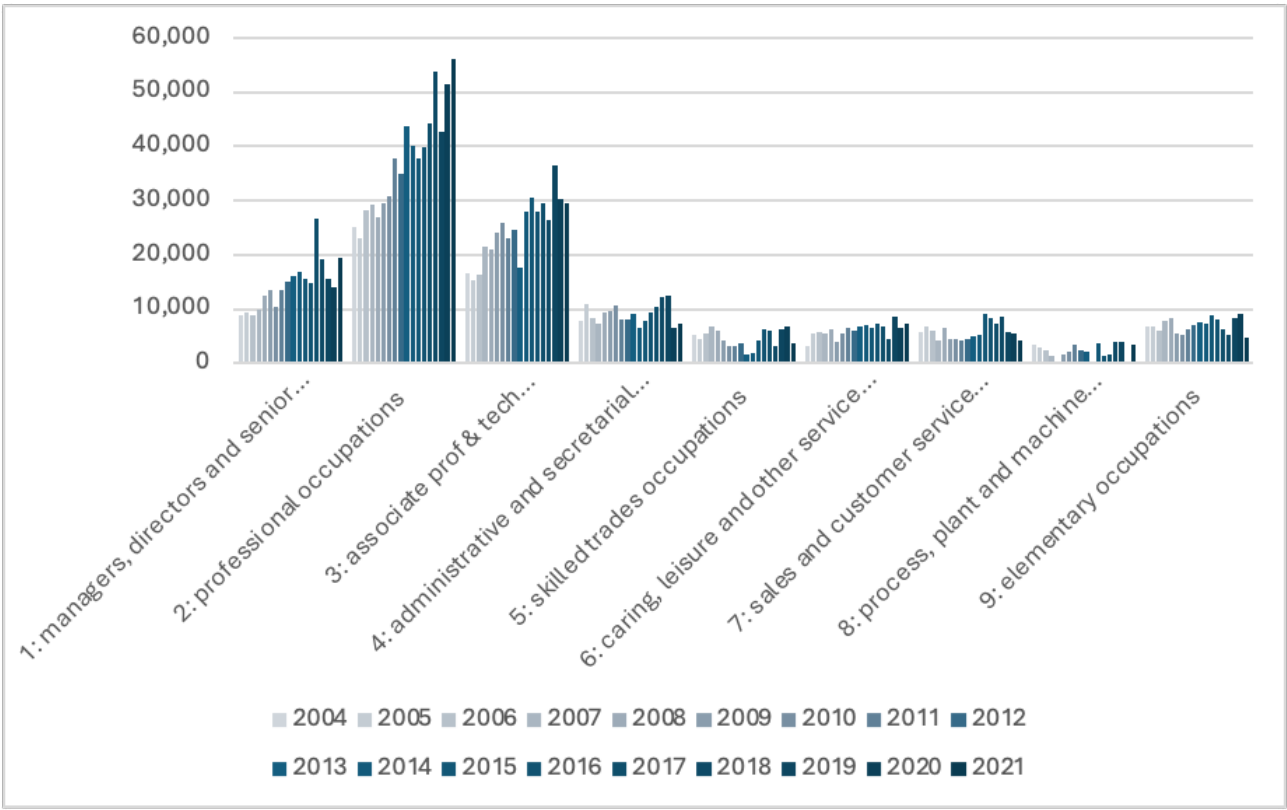
37 Melville D Bivand P and Vaid L (2018) Islington Labour Market Study, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute, p. 9–13.

38 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000019/> - accessed 05/02/2024.

39 Cronberg A (2022) 2021 Census: Ethnicity, Islington Council.

40 <https://censusdata.uk/e09000019-islington/ts024-main-language-detailed>

Figure 1: Residential Occupational Change (SOC2010) 2004-2021

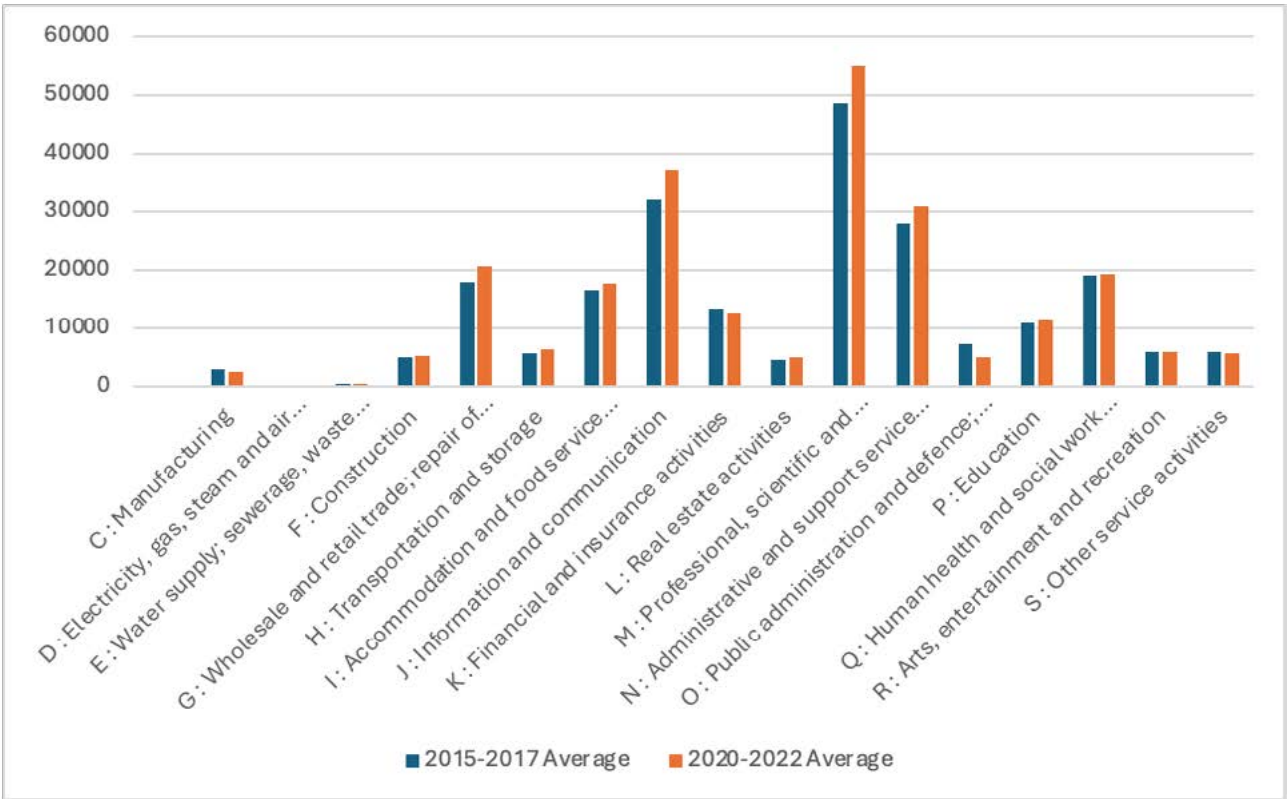


While Islington is characterised by high levels of deprivation, being ranked 28th overall most deprived by the English Indices of Deprivation 2019⁴¹ and having a high proportion of households in the social rented tenure (40.2% as of the 2021 census⁴²), **the occupational profile of its residents has shifted significantly towards higher paying jobs over the last two decades**. As of 2021, many residents work in managerial and professional occupations (**Figure 1**)⁴³.

Turning to Islington's labour market (rather than the occupational profile of residents) the borough is dominated by jobs in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities and Information and Communication sectors, accounting for 55,000 and 37,000 jobs respectively for the period 2020-22 (**Figure 2**).⁴⁴ Other important sectors include Administrative and Support Service Activities (N), Wholesale and Retail Trade (G), Accommodation and Food Service (I) and Human Health and Social Work (Q). **Collectively these six sectors account for 75% of all jobs in LBI (241,500 for 2020-2022) and are the sectors we focus on in much of the analysis that follows**. They are also the sectors (with the exception of Human Health and Social Work) that are growing.

41 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019-mapping-resources#indices-of-deprivation-2019-explorer-postcode-mapper> – accessed 08/02/2024.
 42 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/housing/tenure-of-household/hh-tenure-5a/owned-owns-outright?lad=E09000019> – accessed 08/02/2024.
 43 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157251/report.aspx?town=Islington#tabearn>
 44 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employee-jobs-by-sectors>

Figure 2: Employee Jobs by Industry (BRES) 2015/17 to 2020/22 (3-year averages)



2.3. National Minimum Wage Violations, Unpaid Wages and Low Pay

In this section, we explore compliance with the statutory minimum wage (under The National Minimum Wage Act 1998), unpaid wages (under the Employment Rights Act 1996) and the distribution of low pay.

2.3.1. National Minimum Wage

Estimates from the Low Pay Commission, on the number of workers covered by the national minimum wage at the LA level, indicate that **3.1% of Islington residents (around 3,500 people⁴⁵) were covered by the national minimum wage as of 2023⁴⁶**. For workers in Islington (rather than residents), this figure is approximately 4,200 (or 2.5%) for 2023. Nationally the LPC estimates that 365,000 people were illegally underpaid in 2023⁴⁷, and applying this national estimate to Islington would suggest 983 workers and 819 residents potentially being illegally paid under the minimum wage in 2023.

45 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-minimum-wage-coverage-by-home-location>

46 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-pay-commission-report-2023>

47 Low Pay Commission (2024) National Minimum Wage: *Low Pay Commission Report 2023*, London: LPC, p. 142.

2.3.2. Unpaid Wages

There is a lack of concrete data on unpaid wages⁴⁸. One dataset is the government lists of minimum wage offenders, but this is released inconsistently and because HMRC investigations are complaint led, is likely to a poor indicator of the true extent of the problem. Rather better data exists in relation to specific issues around unpaid wages (especially in relation to holiday and sick pay), which we explore in section 2.4 below).

Nonetheless, a previous study of the issues in London revealed a greater prevalence of unpaid wages in security and investigations, retail, food and beverage services and other personal services⁴⁹.

2.3.3. Low Pay

In this research low pay is assessed using two measures: workers paid below the Living Wage Foundation's (LWF) specified threshold (£13.15 for London in 2023-24) and the internationally recognised measure of relative poverty, which is pay below 2/3s of median income. ONS data for 2021-2023 shows that the percentage of workers (rather than residents) being paid less than the London Living Wage is lower in Islington than for Inner London, London, or for the UK as whole⁵⁰.

Secondly, we also explore the number of residents earning below 2/3s median income, both for the UK as a whole and the regional measure (for London). **While the number of residents experiencing low pay in Islington by the national measure is very low (3%), it is quite high by the regional measure (which better captures local living costs).** Moreover, when we turn to some of the industries that are represented in Islington (using London-wide data), we can see that low pay is heavily concentrated in sectors like Wholesale and Retail Trade, Administrative and Support Services, and Accommodation and Food Services (**Figure 3**). Women, particularly in the Accommodation and Food Services sector, experience higher levels of low pay, with 42.6% earning less than the regional standard. Administrative and Support Services is unusual in that there are more men experiencing low pay (35.2% versus 24.9% of women, by the regional measure)⁵¹.

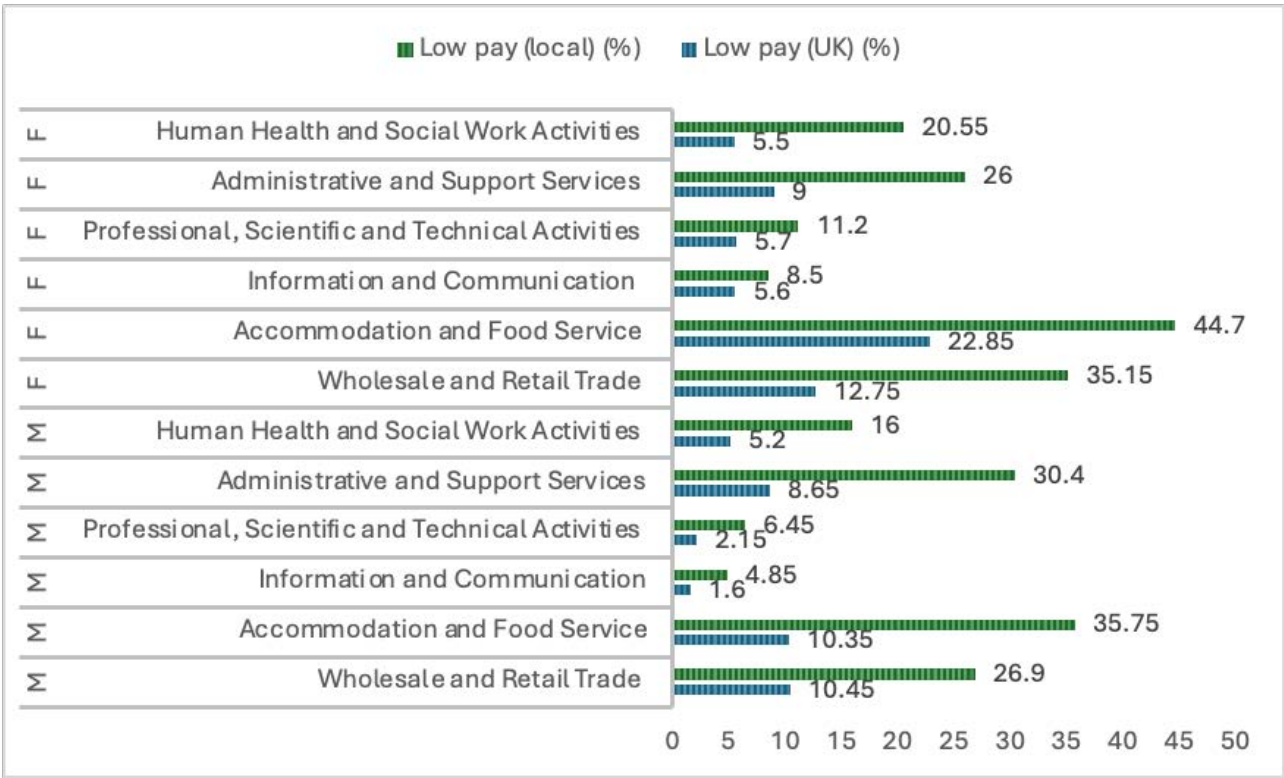
48 Clark N and Herman E (2017) *Unpaid Britain: wage default in the British labour market*, Middlesex University and Trust for London: London, p. 6.

49 Clark and Herman (2017), p. 18-19.

50 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/numberandproportionofemployeejobswithhourlypaybelowthelivingwage>

51 This data is considered reasonably robust at the Greater London level. There is a significant deterioration across a number of sectors on the local level of low pay, relative to the 2018 job quality indicators (especially for men in Retail and Administrative Support), but this is not inconsistent with the impacts of the pandemic.

Figure 3: Low Pay by Sector and Gender (LFS/APS) 2021 (London Regional Averages)



2.3.4. Local Sources of Data

Citizens Advice Islington (CAI) recorded 101 cases related to wage issues from January 2023 and January 2024. Issues covered a range of topics potentially linked to payment below the statutory minimum (including ‘national minimum wage’, ‘wages and payslips’, ‘unlawful deductions’, ‘holidays’, ‘sick leave’, ‘sick pay’, ‘non-payment of tax and national insurance’ and ‘recovery of training costs’)⁵². However, as we discuss in **Part 4** of the report, the total number of employment issues brought to CA Islington is likely to be more of consequence of the limited resources of the service, rather than a reliable indicator of demand.

Our wider analysis of existing research found most Algerian, Bangladeshi and Somali Islington residents were working in poorly paid jobs⁵³. **A 2018 report by CAI found that 72% of those they had supported were non-white British, and 26% were either disabled or had long-term health conditions**⁵⁴. A research note on the gig economy in Islington stated that Black and Asian Minority Ethnic graduates would end up in this type of work, which is notorious for poor pay and conditions⁵⁵, and another internal report noted that many Islington residents that had caring responsibilities were often in low-paying precarious work⁵⁶.

52 Data provided to the authors by Citizens Advice Islington (2024).
 53 Lewis J Yu Q Mulrenan P Gay D and Flynn J (2022) *Islington Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Employment Research Project Final Report*, <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/IslingtonBAMEEmploymentFinalReport1%20%282%29.pdf>
 54 Citizens Advice Islington (2018) *End of project evaluation report for Make It Work at Citizens Advice Islington*, internal report.
 55 Islington Council (2020a) *Improving employment outcomes for residents working in the ‘Gig Economy’*, internal report.
 56 Islington Council (2020b), *Islington Evidence Base Executive Summary*, internal report.



Delayed or missing payments were reported by Latin American women in the domestic, hospitality, and business services sectors within London, with 46% reporting unlawful deduction of wages and 20% illegal underpayment of the national minimum wage (n = 326)⁵⁷. Not receiving tips or service charges was another form of missing payment and was flagged in a report looking into the experiences of Kurdish and Turkish migrants working across a number of sectors in London⁵⁸.

A specific form of wage theft included workers using their own money to purchase resources and training for work. This commonly occurred in the care, domestic⁵⁹, hospitality⁶⁰, and business services sectors⁶¹, with many workers purchasing their own protective wear such as gloves and masks. One report on migrant workers employed in hospitality in London found that 19% of their sample (n = 115) had to pay for their own uniforms and/or work equipment⁶².

2.4. Lack of Statutory Entitlements

In this section, we explore compliance around statutory entitlements to paid annual leave (under the Working Time Regulations 1998), Statutory Sick Pay (under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992) and protection against unfair dismissal (under the Employment Rights Act 1996). Access to these rights is partially contingent upon whether an individual is classed as an 'employee', 'worker' or 'self-employed'⁶³.

2.4.1. Paid Annual Leave

The Resolution Foundation, on the basis of their analysis of the 2022 Labour Force Survey estimates that 3% of eligible workers, or about 900,000 people, received no paid holiday entitlement⁶⁴. Applying this to LBI's 126,900 residents - who were employees in December 2023⁶⁵ - suggests that roughly 3,807 people each year are denied their right to paid holiday.

The risk of being denied holiday pay is not equally distributed and the Resolution Foundation found that **up to 14% of the lowest paid (bottom quintile) received no paid holiday**⁶⁶. The risk is also linked to worker demographics, with the oldest age group (65 and over) and the youngest (under 25s) being much more likely to receive no paid holiday than the age groups in between. Women were somewhat more likely to face this situation than men, migrants (in the last 5 years) more likely than non-migrants and the Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups much more so than Chinese, White or Indian⁶⁷.

57 de la Silva N Granada L and Modern D (2019) *The unheard workforce – experiences of Latin American migrant women in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work*. <https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/unheard-workforce-research.pdf>, p. 3.

58 GIK-DER UK (2022) *Perspectives of migrant workers from Turkey in London's labour markets*, https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Perspectives_of_migrant_workers_in_Turkey_on_Londons_labour_markets.pdf, p.15.

59 de la Silva et al (2019) and Crunden O and Dromey J (2019) *Employment rights service – community action research*, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute, <https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1056/employment-rights-service-final-report>

60 de la Silva et al (2019) and Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) (2021b) *To help workers, I would tell the government to...*, <https://labourexploitation.org/publications/to-help-workers-i-would-tell-the-government-to-participatory-research-with-workers-in-the-uk-hospitality-sector/>

61 de la Silva et al (2019) and FLEX (2021b).

62 FLEX (2021b), p. 20.

63 Learning and Work Institute (2017) *What is Driving Insecure Work? A Sector Perspective. Report to the Trades Union Congress*, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute, p. 8-9.

64 Judge L and Slaughter H (2023) *Enforce for good: Effectively enforcing labour market rights in the 2020s and beyond*, London: Resolution Foundation, p. 17.

65 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157251/report.aspx?town=Islington#tabrespop>

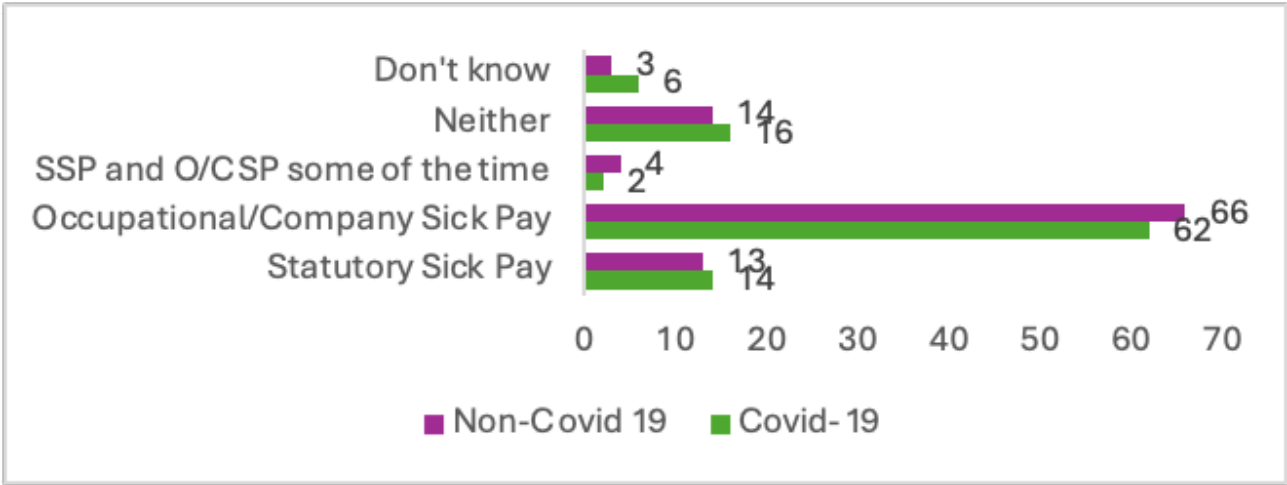
66 Judge and Slaughter (2023), p. 22.

67 Judge and Slaughter (2023), p. 20.

2.4.2. Statutory Sick Pay

Government research, conducted on the basis of a large random sample of the population in Great Britain records that around one-third of workers (35%) in the 12 months to April 2021 had taken time off work due to self-isolation, illness, a health condition, injury or disability⁶⁸. However, this research shows that while two-thirds of those received some form of Occupational Sick Pay, **14% did not received any form of sick pay**, rising to 16% of those with Covid related absences (see **Figure 4**)⁶⁹. Applying these figures to the resident Islington population in employment produces a rough estimate of 6,218 employees or workers who were ill but unable to access sick pay in a 12-month period. The number of workers in Islington who are unable to access sick pay is likely to be somewhat higher than for residents.

Figure 4: Access to Sick Pay (DWP) 2021 (GB-wide) ⁷⁰



2.4.3. Unfair Dismissal

Unfair dismissal claims can only be ruled on by Employment Tribunals, making it difficult to judge the true scale of this harm. While the number of claims that received compensation generally fell between 2010/11 and 2020/21, likely due to the increased challenges of bringing cases (not least as a result of tribunal fees, introduced in 2013 and struck down by the Supreme Court in 2017), nationally, the number of claims of unfair dismissal leading to awards of compensation have increased in the last 2 years from 630 in 2021/22 to 790 in 2022/23⁷¹.

68 Jacobs G McHugh S Shaw A and Anand T (2023) *Employee research phase 2: Sickness absence and return to work*, DWP research report no. 1022, p. 5.

69 Jacobs et al (2023), p. 27.

70 Reproduced from Jacobs et al (2023), p. 27.

71 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2023/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2023#employment-tribunals>

2.4.4. Other Sources of Data

In Islington, 19 cases relating to holiday entitlement were brought to CA between January 2023 and January 2024, accounting for 14% of all issues pertaining to pay and entitlements. In terms of qualitative evidence, CA reported helping a woman working as a carer through an agency recover around 200 hours' worth (or £2k) in unpaid accrued holiday pay⁷². In another case CA helped a different worker challenge their employer's practice of rolling up holiday pay in their hourly rate of pay (which denies the worker the income at the time when they actually take their annual leave).

Between January 2023 and January 2024 27 issues relating to sick pay and sick leave were brought to CAI, accounting for just under 20% of all issues related to pay and entitlements. CAI's Employment Law Advice Service (ELAS) reported supporting a vulnerable worker who was working in the hospitality industry and helped achieve a settlement in lieu of potential claims for her employers failure to make reasonable adjustments and possible disability discrimination. While her GP recommended a return to work with light duties her employer was unwilling to make those adjustments and ultimately dismissed her for performance reasons⁷³.

In terms of issues around dismissal, categorised as 'unfair dismissal', 'constructive dismissal', 'wrongful dismissal' and 'rights including access to written reasons', these accounted for 92 issues brought to CAI for the last calendar year. One case reported by CAI in 2018⁷⁴ related to a shop worker who was dismissed for gross misconduct after complaining about a manager who had made racist comments. The case was settled through mediation for an undisclosed sum.

A report capturing the experiences of Kurdish and Turkish migrants working across precarious sectors in London, found that 14% of the sample (n = 418) did not get holiday pay⁷⁵. In another report, 9% (n = 326) of Latin American women working in the hospitality, business support and care/domestic sectors in London had faced abuse on the grounds of maternity, which includes refusal to pay for hours spent at prenatal appointments⁷⁶. A further report noted that 17% of their sample (n = 115) working in hospitality in the UK 'never' felt able to take time off when sick due to their employment on ZHCs, and 35% reported having no access to sick pay⁷⁷.

The report of Latin American women working in the hospitality, business services and domestic/care sector in London also shared that 10% of their sample (n = 326) had experienced unfair dismissal, though this was likely unreported due to finding and funding legal advice. In the same report it was also flagged that many workers were ineligible to claim for unfair dismissal because they were terminated from their roles before they reached the qualifying threshold of two years of employment⁷⁸.

72 Citizens Advice Islington (2023) *Employment Legal Advice Service: Final Report to Trust for London*, internal report, p. 7.

73 Citizens Advice Islington (2023), p. 6-7.

74 Citizens Advice Islington (2018), p. 8.

75 GIK-DER UK (2022), p. 15.

76 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 15.

77 FLEX (2021b), p. 24.

78 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 12.

2.5. Health and Safety: Physical and Mental Health Harms

In this section, we explore compliance around employers' duty of care to workers (under common law and legislation such as the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) 1974). Enforcement of Health and Safety legislation is split between LAs and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), with the latter having responsibility for industries that are perceived to be higher risk, and for the public sector. Both enforcement agencies have suffered significant cuts in recent years, leading to falling levels of inspections and prosecutions⁷⁹.

Conversations with Regulatory Services at Islington Council revealed that as a result of government direction, routine health and safety inspections are no longer carried out, but are rather complaint-led. The exceptions to this are routine Food Hygiene inspections that can be used to 'hazard spot' wider issues, as well as project driven work. The latter is linked to local priorities and has included work around dermatitis (in hair and beauty workplaces), violence at work (focusing on betting shops) and dangerous machinery (in catering). Moreover, local teams took on an enormous number of additional inspections during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Islington Council is also relatively unique in having a duty line, whereby people can directly contact the Commercial Environmental Health Team (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) rather than going through a generic LA call centre⁸⁰. Nevertheless, **there are concerns that workers are not coming forward with complaints**, and that most of the incidents that are recorded under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) 2013⁸¹ are coming from large businesses and high street chains who are more likely to have robust health and safety management and human resources procedures. This suggests issues affecting workers in small business particularly may be underreported and underenforced.

2.5.1. Physical Health Harms

While the HSE (via RIDDOR)⁸² estimates that up to 50% of workplace injuries go unreported, available data shows that **Islington's rate of non-fatal injuries is 147 per 100,000 employees, lower than both the England and London averages but higher than the Inner London average**⁸³.

Turning to the six industries that are the particular focus of this research, using the same measure (**Figure 5**), we can see that the two sectors featuring a higher concentration of office-based and professional occupations also have very low levels of reportable injuries. Although they are somewhat higher for Administrative and Support Service activities and Retail, the highest rate is associated with the Accommodation and Food Service sector, though much of this is accounted for by the accommodation sub-sector (445) rather than food and beverage service (217).

79 Tombs S (2017) 'Undoing Social Protection' in Cooper V and Whyte D (eds) *The Violence of Austerity*, London: Pluto Press, p. 135, and Clancy M (2023) 'A perfect storm: why funding cuts are affecting HSE's ability to regulate', <https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2023/a-perfect-storm-why-funding-cuts-are-affecting-hse-s-ability-to-regulate>

80 <https://www.islington.gov.uk/business/ehealthcomm/healthandsafety>

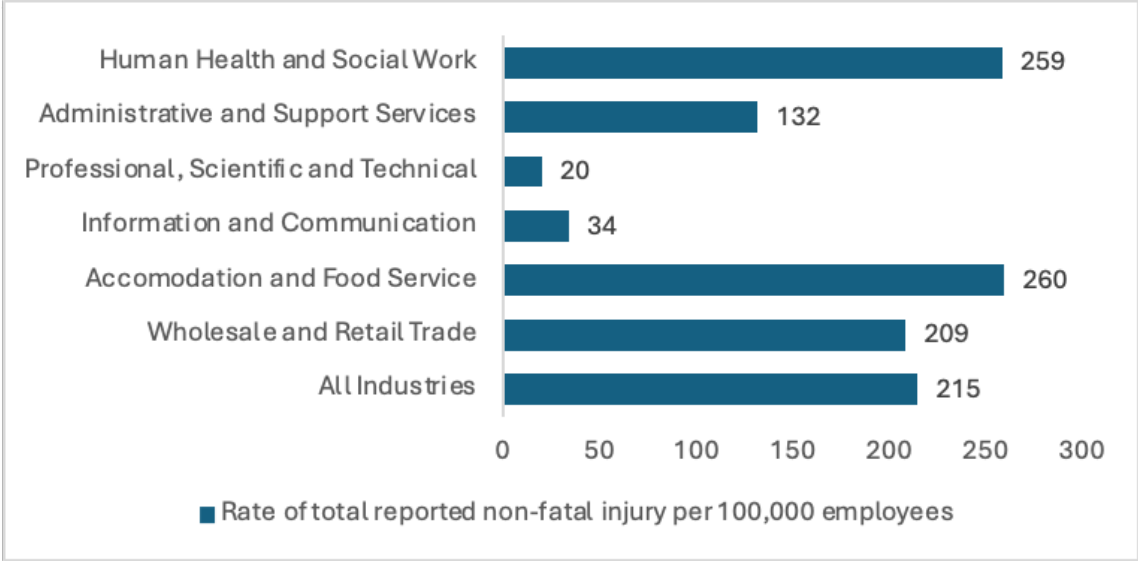
81 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/>

82 <https://resources.unitetheunion.org/media/1155/1155.pdf>

83 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/regions/tables.htm>



Figure 5: Total Non-Fatal Injury Rate (per 100,000 employees) by Industry (RIDDOR) 2022/23



2.5.2. Mental Health Harms

Data from the LFS⁸⁴, suggests that work-related stress, depression, and anxiety rates in London (2,690 per 100,000) are above the national average. When looking at stress, depression and anxiety caused or made worse by our six focal sectors, the highest levels are recorded in Human Health and Social Work (3,530 per 100,000), followed by Professional Activities (2,310), both of which are above the average for all industries (2,070). Below that line are Information and Communication (1,870), Wholesale and Retail (1,530), Accommodation and Food (1,430) and Administrative and Support Services (1,160).

2.5.3. Local Sources of Data and Case Studies

While just 7 issues around workplace Health and Safety were brought to CAI between January 2023 and January 2024, a further 22 issues were brought in relation to ‘disability excluding mental health’ and 13 issues linked to mental health, both of which potentially link to workplace health and safety.

We examined four reports that made a link between protected characteristics, precarious work and excessive hours; this included reports of Latin American migrant women in London⁸⁵ and the UK⁸⁶, working in the domestic/ care, business support, hospitality sectors, who faced normal working hours of 12-16 hours per day. One report looked into working patterns of largely male migrant couriers in London and found that because earnings depend on fluctuating customer demand, some couriers often have to work extremely long hours⁸⁷.

84 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/lfs/index.htm>

85 de la Silva et al (2019).

86 Modern D Calvete Portela Barbosa L (2023) *Behind closed doors: experiences of Latin American domestic workers in the UK*, <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/behind-closed-doors-experiences-of-latin-american-domestic-workers-in-the-uk/>

87 The Police Foundation (2020) *Victimisation and fear of crime in the gig economy*, https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/crime_gig_economy_nov20.pdf p. 9.

Working in job roles with significant hazards was a frequent occurrence across the literature. For example, **in the hospitality sector, 94% of workers (n = 115) from a UK sample reported health issues due to their employment, with 38% reporting that they were asked to work in ways they considered to be dangerous or unsafe**⁸⁸. Individuals working in the gig economy in London in cleaning or construction also reported unsafe working practices⁸⁹.

The report of Latin American migrant women working in the hospitality, business support, domestic/ care sectors in London, found that 25% of their sample of cases (n = 326) had experienced health and safety issues, mainly due to injuries from wet floors, stairs and cables, and no or limited protective equipment⁹⁰. It was also flagged in the report that many of these women had encountered injuries from the intense physical and repetitive nature of the work but were unable to evidence the responsibility of a single employer as these injuries were often experienced over many years.

2.6. Employment Insecurity and Dependent Self-Employment

Precarious work is a complex term without fixed definition⁹¹, but in this report we focus on the more straightforwardly measurable aspects, namely zero hours contracts (ZHCs) and part-time working, and self-employment. In terms of legislation, compliance relates to the Part-Time Workers Regulations (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) 2000⁹², and the Employment Rights Act 1996. For the latter a key issue is the denial of employment rights in cases of “dependent” or “bogus” self-employment, where self-employed workers face control akin to employees⁹³.

2.6.1. Zero Hour Contracts (ZHCs)

While there are issues with the measure of ZHCs utilised by the Office for National Statistics⁹⁴, it is an indicator that allows us to make comparisons down to regional (and sometimes local) geographies and across economic sectors. In 2020, **2% of Islington residents were on ZHCs**, lower than the regional and national average of around 2.8-2.9%. However, when we look at the national trends for our six focal sectors (**Figure 6**), we can see much higher levels of workers on ZHCs and especially a significant upwards trend for the Accommodation and Food Service sector.

88 FLEX (2021b), p. 25.

89 Belcher E and Bosetti N (2021) *Supporting London's self-employed workers*, <https://centreforlondon.org/publication/self-employed-londoners/>

90 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 13.

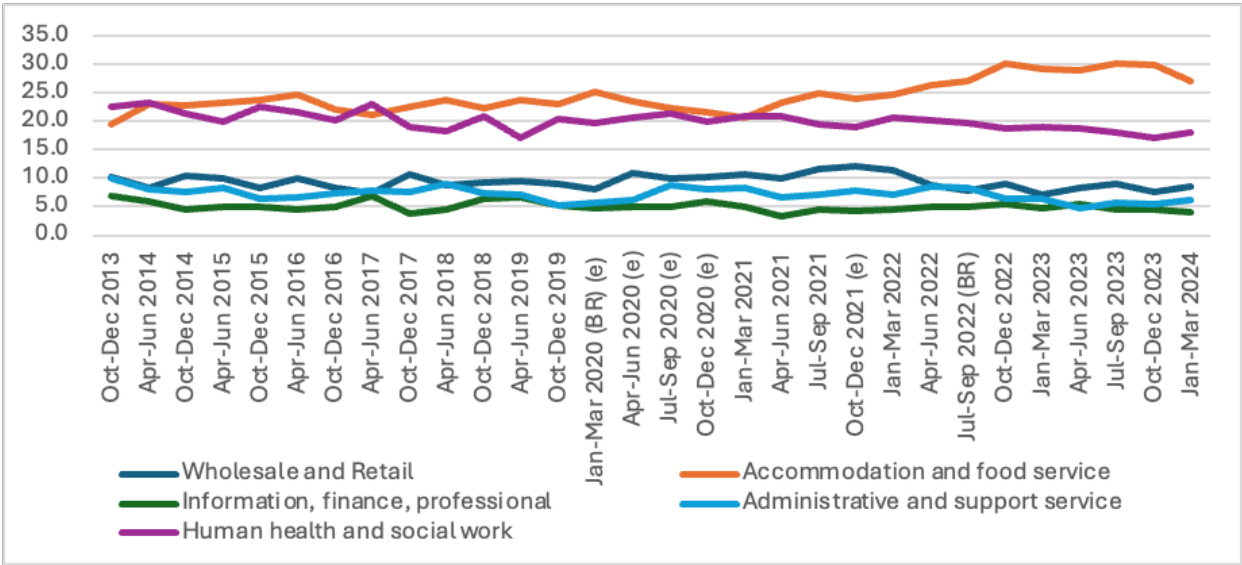
91 Moore S and Newsome K (2018) 'Paying for Free Delivery: Dependent Self-Employment as a Measure of Precarity in Parcel Delivery', *Work, Employment and Society*. 32(3). P. 476.

92 <https://www.acas.org.uk/part-time-workers>

93 Moore and Newsome (208), p. 476.

94 Adams A and Prassl J (2015) 'The Prevalence of Zero hours Contracts: Empirical Evidence', in Ludlow A and Blackham A (Eds) *New Frontiers in Empirical Labour Law Research*, Hart Publishing: Oxford, UK and Portland, OR, pp. 170-171.

Figure 6: Zero Hours Contracts by Sector (LFS) 2013-2023⁹⁵



2.6.2. Part-Time Working

Another clear measure of insecure employment relates to levels of part-time working. **Part-time working can offer much needed flexibility for some workers. However, it can also be an indicator of limited alternatives, and women are heavily concentrated into part-time roles.**

This is a major contributor to the gender pay gap, as part-time workers tend to earn less per hour⁹⁶. At the national level, workers of Pakistani and Bangladeshi (30%), Black (26%) and Mixed (25%) backgrounds are more likely to be employed on a part-time basis compared to White British (24%)⁹⁷.

For residents in Islington, part-time employment stood at 17.1% in 2022, below the London (18.2%) and Great Britain averages (22.9%). However, part-time work is highly gendered, with only 7.4% of men compared to 28.7% of women in Islington undertaking part-time work⁹⁸.

Moreover, when we examine jobs in Islington, as opposed to residents, again using the figures for London as a whole as a proxy, we see some further differences. What is evident in **Figure 7** is that levels of part-time working are very high in Accommodation and Food Service (45.5%), Wholesale and Retail (34.4%), Health and Social Work (33.4%) and Administrative and Support Services (30.4%). **Part-time working is also much higher for women across all sectors and exceptionally high in hospitality (52%) and retail (44%).**

⁹⁵ Years with '(e)' indicate an error in the calculation of figures by the ONS. This does not, however, detract from the overall trend.

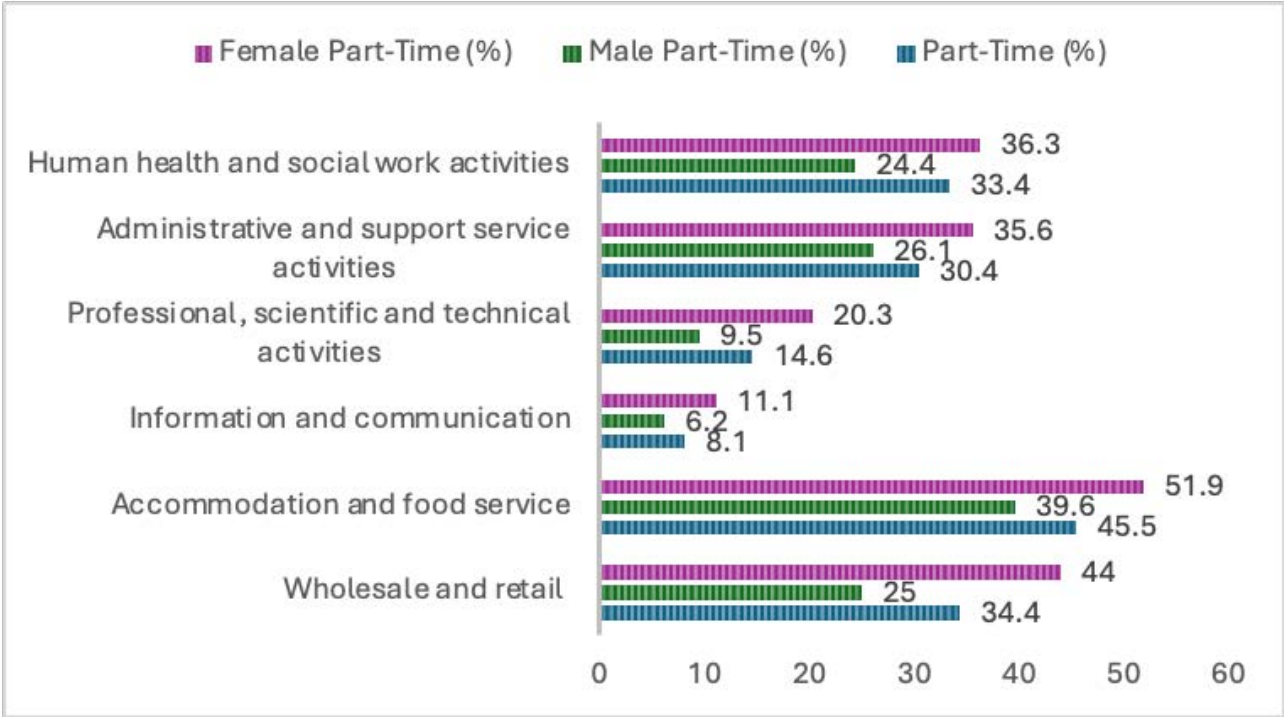
⁹⁶ Francis-Devine B and Hutton G (2024) *Women in the UK economy*, London: House of Commons Library, p. 5.

⁹⁷ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/full-time-and-part-time-employment/latest/#by-ethnicity-over-time-part-time-only>

⁹⁸ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-self-employed-full-time-and-part-time-and-gender-borough>



Figure 7: Part-Time Employment by Sector for London (BRES+APS/LFS) 2023

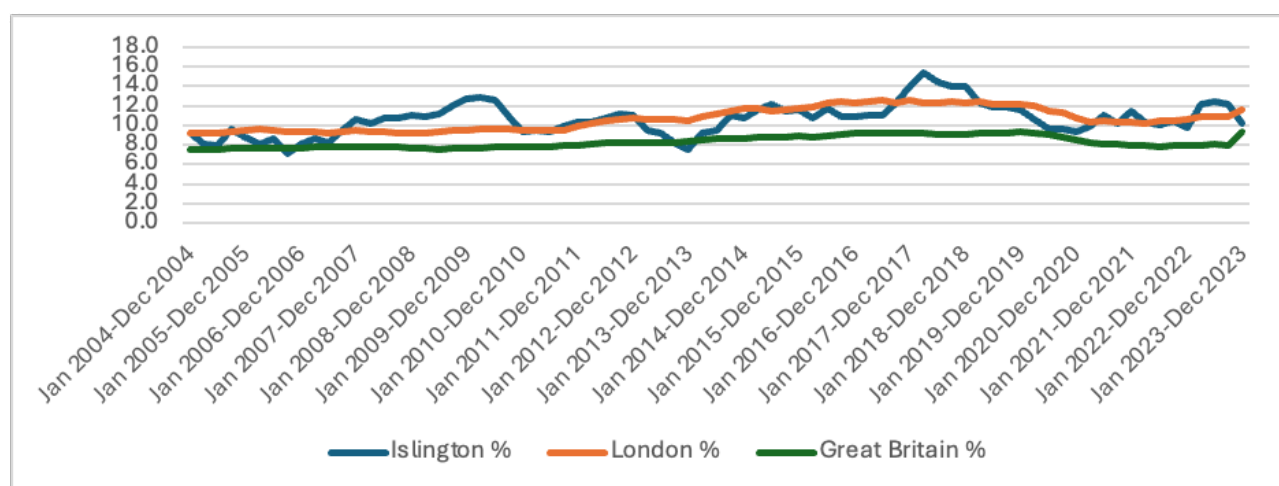


Furthermore, although satisfaction with the number of working hours is determined by other factors aside from zero-hour and part-time employment contracts, it is notable the highest levels of dissatisfaction for both men and women on a regional basis (for London) are concentrated in Accommodation and Food and Administrative and Support Services, both of which show an uptick between 2018 and 2021 (possibly linked to the Covid pandemic).

2.6.3. Self-Employment

Self-employment accounted for 10.2% of Islington residents in 2023, with men (12.8%) more likely than women (6.8%) to be self-employed. Looking at the time-series data for total self-employment (Figure 8) and being cautious of the relatively small sample sizes these estimates are based on, levels have fluctuated significantly over the last two decades, from a low of 7.5% in September 2006, to an absolute peak of 16.8% at March 2018, but have generally trended upwards. At a national level self-employment is concentrated in a small number of industries, including Construction, Other Services (which includes hairdressing, dry cleaning and personal wellbeing services), Administrative and Support Services, and Professional Activities.

Figure 8: Total Self-Employment in Islington (APS/LFS) Jan 2001-Dec 2023



On the question of bogus self-employment, CA nationally have sought to quantify levels through a survey of 491 people in 2015 that utilised the same questions as HMRC Employment Status Indicator tool. This research - while somewhat dated - revealed that 10.4% of their sample who believed themselves to be self-employed could be classified as employees. At a national level this would amount to 460,000 people being bogusly self-employed⁹⁹. **Applying the same estimate to Islington residents self-employed as of December 2023 would suggest as many as 2,101 are subject to bogus forms of self-employment.**

Focusing in on a group that is seen as totemic of the gig economy – namely platform workers involved in taxi services and food delivery courier activities, both of which fall under the Transport and Storage industrial sector – a recent study has revealed just how low rates of pay can be. Based on a sample of 257 workers in local gig economies (primarily employed by Deliveroo, UberEats and Uber), the research revealed a median hourly rate of pay of just £8, at a time when the national minimum wage was £9.50¹⁰⁰.

99 Citizens Advice (2015) *Neither one thing nor the other: how reducing bogus self-employment could benefit workers, business and the Exchequer*, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/Neither%20one%20thing%20nor%20the%20other.pdf> p. 11.

100 Wood A J Burchell B & Martindale N (2023) *Initial Findings from the Gig Rights Project: Labour Rights, Co-Determination, Collectivism and Job Quality in the UK Gig Economy*, Bristol: University of Bristol, p. 13.

2.6.4. Local Sources of Data and Case Studies

In the 12 months to January 2024, 4 issues relating to part-time worker discrimination were brought to the attention of CAI, in addition to 3 issues relating to agency workers, one issue related to ZHCs and 5 related to the employment status of self-employed individuals. However, there are potentially a large number of additional issues that fall under other categories that may relate to employment insecurity (for example, 39 issues under ‘contract queries’).

CAI’s Make It Work project (2015 – 2018) supported workers who were subject to potentially dubious forms of self-employment. In one example, a woman in her 50s who had worked for a small high street business for many years and her employer asked her to switch from being classified as an employee to being self-employed. Her hours of work and job content would remain the same, but if she had agreed she would no longer be entitled to paid annual leave, statutory sick pay, redundancy pay and protection from unfair dismissal. The worker had concerns around national insurance payments, eligibility for her basic state pension and being able to maintain proper records for the purpose of income tax self-assessment¹⁰¹.

Further there are issues with precarious contracts across the care, retail, business support and hospitality sectors in the capital¹⁰², where workers consistently face short hours or cuts in their hours and therefore lower pay. This was reported by 20% of Kurdish and Turkish workers (n = 418)¹⁰³, as well as by hospitality workers, who face amongst the lowest average number of hours worked in the UK¹⁰⁴. Further issues related to ZHCs in the hospitality sector include workers being taken off the rota when they were sick (and their shifts given to others), instead of being paid sick leave (see section 2.4 above)¹⁰⁵.

Examples of bogus self-employment included live-in migrant carers¹⁰⁶ and couriers in London, with some of the latter being penalised if they did not accept shifts¹⁰⁷. Similarly, 48% of respondents (n = 990) from a study of work in the UK transport, warehouse, manufacturing and retail sectors, reported that they were not able to determine their hours of work¹⁰⁸.

101 Citizens Advice Islington (2018), p. 9.

102 Jooshandeh J (2021) *Key Workers in the Capital – One year in London*, RSA Briefing (008), https://tfl.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Key_Workers_in_the_Capital_-_RSA_briefing_April_2021.pdf; Bangham G (2020) *The times they aren’t a changin’*. London: Resolution Foundation, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/01/The-times-they-arent-a-changin.pdf>; Gik-Der (2022).

103 Gik-Der (2022), p. 15.

104 Bangham (2020), p. 6.

105 FLEX (2021b), p. 24.

106 Ahlberg M Emberson C Granada L Hussein S and Turnpenny A (2022) *The vulnerability of paid migrant live-in care workers in London to modern slavery*, <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2022/july/the-vulnerability-of-paid-migrant-live-in-care-workers-in-london-to-modern-slavery.pdf>

107 The Police Foundation (2020), p. 9.

108 Gilbert A Thomas A (2021) *The Amazonian Era - How algorithmic systems are eroding good work*, <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/research/the-amazonian-era-how-algorithmic-systems-are-eroding-good-work/>, p. 24.

2.7. Discrimination and Harassment

In this section we explore discrimination and harassment, which is illegal when it relates to the nine protected characteristics identified by the **Equality Act 2010**¹⁰⁹. We are not able to do justice to the full range of protected characteristics within the scope of this project, so in this section we focus on gender and race (or ethnicity).

Enforcement of the Equality Act 2010 largely relies on individuals bringing cases through the Employment Tribunals system, where they face a range of barriers, from arbitrary time limits and an inability to access (costly) legal representation¹¹⁰ to the low levels of compensation that can be awarded¹¹¹. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) does have a role as regulator for the Equality Act but can only initiate legal proceedings in relation to breaches by public bodies¹¹². Moreover, the EHRC is arguably highly limited by financial constraints and has seen its budget cut to less than 1/3 of the original level granted on its creation in 2007¹¹³.

2.7.1. Gender and Sexual Harassment

One of the clearest indicators of gendered inequality is the gender pay gap - the average difference between the hourly earnings of men and women. By this indicator, Islington fares well¹¹⁴, at least in terms of residential employment, with a lower median (6.4%) pay gap than the comparable rates for Inner London (9.6%), London (12.2%), England (16.2%) or the UK (15.2%). The median pay gap is slightly higher for workers rather than residents (at 10.1%), but still lower than the regional and national averages.

Another prevalent issue is sexual harassment and particularly for women who are multiply marginalised on the basis of sexual orientation, age, disability and ethnicity¹¹⁵. **While there is a lack of good survey evidence on workplace sexual harassment, a 2017 BBC commissioned survey of over 6,000 respondents indicated that London had the highest rates of workers reporting unwanted sexual behaviour at work**. There is also a very clear sectoral distribution to sexual harassment, with the very highest rates being experienced by women in hospitality (55% having ever experienced it), technology and telecoms (52%), and services (47%)¹¹⁶.

2.7.2. Race or Ethnicity

Figure 9 looks at the average employment rate by ethnicity and geography, using a 5-year average of 2018-2022¹¹⁷. It shows that White, Mixed and Indian residents in Islington have generally higher levels of labour force participation than the regional and national averages, but that **Black British and Pakistani/Bangladeshi residents have significantly lower levels of labour force participation**.

109 Sex, gender reassignment, disability, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership, race and religion or belief.

110 Rosenthal and Budjanovcanin (2011) 'Sexual Harassment Judgments by British Employment Tribunals 1995-2005: Implications for Claimants and their Advocates', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol 49(s2): s236-257.

111 Engender (2022) Enough is Enough: Tackling Workplace Sexual Harassment in Scotland, Edinburgh: Engender, <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Enough-is-Enough---tackling-workplace-sexual-harassment-policy-in-Scotland.pdf> p. 70

112 <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/our-legal-work/our-legal-powers/our-litigation-and-enforcement-policy-2022-2025/our>.

113 Engender (2022), p. 72.

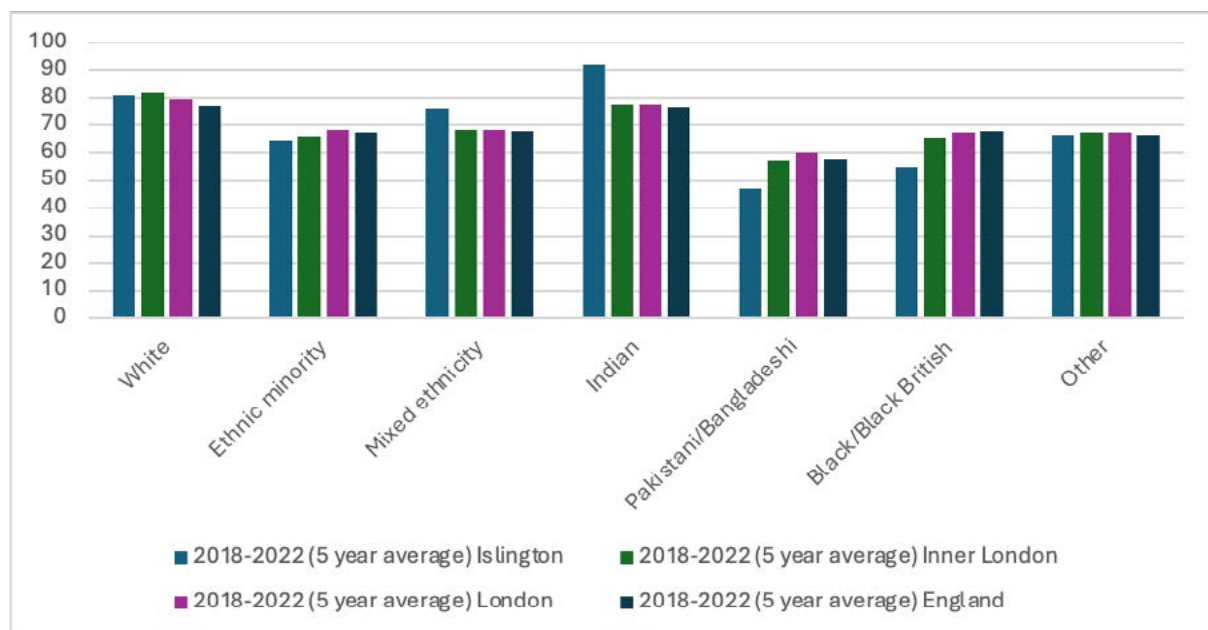
114 Based on 5-year averages (2019-2023) from ASHE data.

115 Jeffery B Beresford R Thomas P Etherington D & Jones M (2024) *Challenging Sexual Harassment in Low Paid and Precarious Hospitality Work*, Sheffield: Zero Hours Justice, <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/33597/>

116 ComRes (2017) BBC: *Sexual harassment in the workplace 2017* (1 December 2017), <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/poll/bbc-sexual-harassment-in-the-work-place-2017/>

117 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity>

Figure 9: Working Age Employment Rates (%) by Ethnicity and Geography (LFS/APS) 2018-2022 (5-year average)



When we examine pay by ethnicity for London as a region in 2022, we can see that those from Black, African, Caribbean or Black British heritage faced a much lower median average hourly rate of pay (£14.16) than those from Other Ethnic Groups (£16.18), Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups (£16.81), Asian or British Asian (£17.71) and White (£20.20) backgrounds¹¹⁸.

2.7.3. Local Sources of Data and Case Studies

In the year to January 2024 65 issues of discrimination were brought to CAI, mostly relating to **disability** (22), **mental health** (13), **race and nationality** (8) and **sex/gender** (6) – those four issues collectively accounting for 75% of the total. A further 9 issues were lodged relating to **bullying and harassment** over the same period.

In a recent report, CAI describe helping four workers achieve settlements averaging £12,000 in cases relating to age, disability and sex discrimination. The cases included selection for redundancy on the basis of a protected characteristic and being victimised for requesting a reasonable adjustment (related to disability)¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/ethnicitypaygapsuk2012to2022>

¹¹⁹ Citizens Advice Islington (2023), p. 3.

Various studies highlight discrimination in workplaces in London particularly faced by minoritised ethnicities. **A survey of Turkish and Kurdish migrants found that 37% reported that they had experienced discrimination at work (n = 418), with 34% also reporting workplace bullying¹²⁰.** Of the entire sample, 42% had come to the UK under the Ankara Agreement, in force between 1973 and 2021, which tied workers' visas to their sponsoring employment and can be seen as increasing their exposure to exploitation. One participant explained that workers under the Ankara Agreement were also paid less than other workers. A further 27% of the sample had come to the UK as asylum seekers¹²¹. In another report, 41% (n = 326) of Latin American women working in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work experienced some form of discrimination, harassment or unreasonable treatment¹²².

Unequal power relationships are highlighted in relation to the hospitality sector and self-employment, with perpetrators abusing their power in terms of being an employer or client, including examples of sexual harassment¹²³. In one report of Latin American women working in the domestic/care, hospitality and business support sectors in London, 16% (n = 326) endured a total of 13 different types of sexual harassment¹²⁴. For those working in hospitality this rose to 22%¹²⁵. Many of their participants described being offered better conditions or increased hours of work by supervisors in return for sexual favours¹²⁶. Sexual harassment was also reported in London within the hospitality sector by Turkish and Kurdish migrant workers¹²⁷, and in the care sector by migrant workers¹²⁸.

2.8. Absence of Worker Voice

In the UK workers have the right to be a member of a trade union of their own choosing and cannot be discriminated against on the basis of union membership¹²⁹. Much of this is codified in the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, and union rights are further enshrined by International Labour Organisation (ILO) treaties and article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The decline of trade union membership in the UK is crucial background to this research, given the evidence that links lower levels of union membership to work-based harms. The reasons for low levels of unionisation are complex. Described in the introduction to this report, we will explore them in relation to Islington specifically in **Part 3**. For the purposes of this section, we focus on simply estimating the levels of union membership in Islington and the scale of decline.

120 GIK-DER (2022), p. 15.

121 GIK-DER (2022), p. 9.

122 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 3.

123 FLEX (2021b); Belcher and Bosetti (2021).

124 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 3.

125 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 7.

126 de la Silva et al (2019), p. 14.

127 GIK-DER (2022), p. 11.

128 Ahlberg et al. (2022), p. 31; Boelman V Radicati A Clayton A De Groot S (2023) *Rights and Risks: Migrant labour exploitation in London*, <https://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/publications/rights-and-risks-migrant-labour-exploitation-in-london/>, p. 27.

129 <https://www.gov.uk/join-trade-union/trade-union-membership-your-employment-rights>

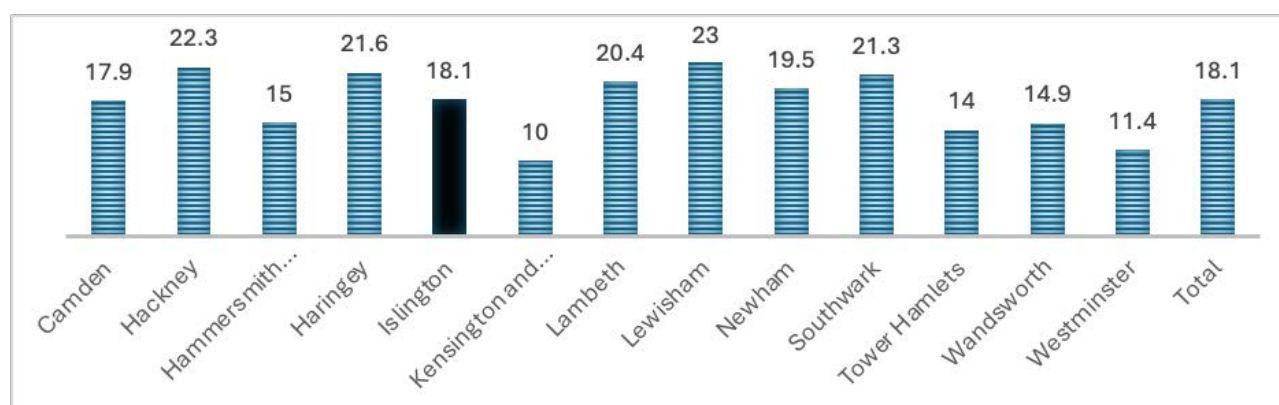
2.8.1. Union Membership Statistics

While national and regional estimates of union membership are available, estimates at the LA level are not reliable. Based on research from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD)¹³⁰, we can estimate Islington residents' **union density** (the proportion of workers who are union members) and union presence (whether or not a union is present in a workplace). These measures are consistently below the national average (**Figure 10**). Between 2000 and 2021, **Islington ranked 369th out of 406 local authorities for union density and saw a 32.7% decline in union membership**, one of the steepest in the UK. The current density for Islington is lower than some other Inner London boroughs (**Figure 11**). We do however need to exercise some caution given the experimental nature of these estimates.

Figure 10: Trade Union Indicators by Geography (WISERD) 2000-2021 Average



Figure 11: Union Density in Inner London Boroughs (WISERD) 2000-2021 Average



¹³⁰ Davies R Bryson A and Jones S (2022) *Geographical Variations in Trade Union Membership 2000-2021*, Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), Cardiff University.

2.9. Impacts of Welfare Conditionality

2.9.1. Background

In this report we consider recent welfare reforms and welfare conditionality as an aspect of work-based harms. Both because of the effect they have in terms of driving (out-of-work and in-work) claimants towards destitution, but also because of the ways they tend to funnel them towards and keep them in low paid and often poor-quality employment¹³¹. They can therefore be seen as **fuelling a ‘low-pay, no-pay’ cycle**¹³², whereby individuals are incentivised into taking any job opportunity, no matter how unsuitable, poor quality or precarious, and then return to claiming welfare when such work inevitably proves unsustainable.

These recent reforms have intensified the existing regime of welfare conditionality and the migration to Universal Credit (UC) is increasing personal debt. This problem arises because of the low level of benefits, the delay in payments to claimants, and the use of sanctions involving the withdrawal of benefits¹³³. The low level of benefits is illustrated by the amount of money received as part of the UC standard allowance¹³⁴ (for example, just £489.98 per week for couples and lone parents in Greater London).

A further aspect of recent welfare reforms is the development of ‘in work benefit’, which has replaced working tax credit as a ‘top up’ for low wages. In 2024 The Universal Credit Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) was increased¹³⁵. People who earn below this threshold must show they are looking for more and better-paid work and this recent increase (the third in 18 months) will draw an additional 180,000 claimants into the Intensive Work Search (IWS) regime. Failure to comply with the IWS can result in their benefits being sanctioned¹³⁶.

The two-child limit and overall benefits cap rules are also driving poverty. Research shows that low-income families are losing around £3,200 a year for any third or subsequent child born after April 2017. The Benefit Cap is a limit to the total amount of some benefits that working-age people can receive¹³⁷. As the area with the highest rents, claimants in London are left with little disposable income after housing costs are paid.

The impacts of these welfare reforms are not equally distributed. Analysis by the Women’s Budget Group (WBG) on the impact of social security cuts since 2010 shows that women in the lowest income decile are losing on average £3,348 per year, African Caribbean and Black British women across all income groups are losing £2,498 per year, disabled women across all income groups £2,533 per year, and lone parents nearly £7,000 per year¹³⁸.

131 Etherington D Jeffery B Thomas P Jones M and Ledger-Jessop B (2023) ‘Trade union strategies to tackle labour market insecurity: Geography and the role of Sheffield TUC’, *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 54(3): 261-277, p. 264.

132 Shildrick T MacDonald R Webster C et al. (2012) *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in Low Pay, No Pay Britain*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

133 Jeffery B Devine D and Thomas P (2018) “‘There’s nothing’: Unemployment, Attitudes to Work and Punitive Welfare Reform in Post-Crash Salford”, *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 23(4), p. 797-8.

134 <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits/universal-credit/how-much-is-universal-credit>

135 <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/universal-credit/what-youll-need-to-do-on-universal-credit/check-how-the-new-earnings-rules-affect-your-universal-credit/>

136 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5804/ldselect/ldsecleg/107/10703.htm>

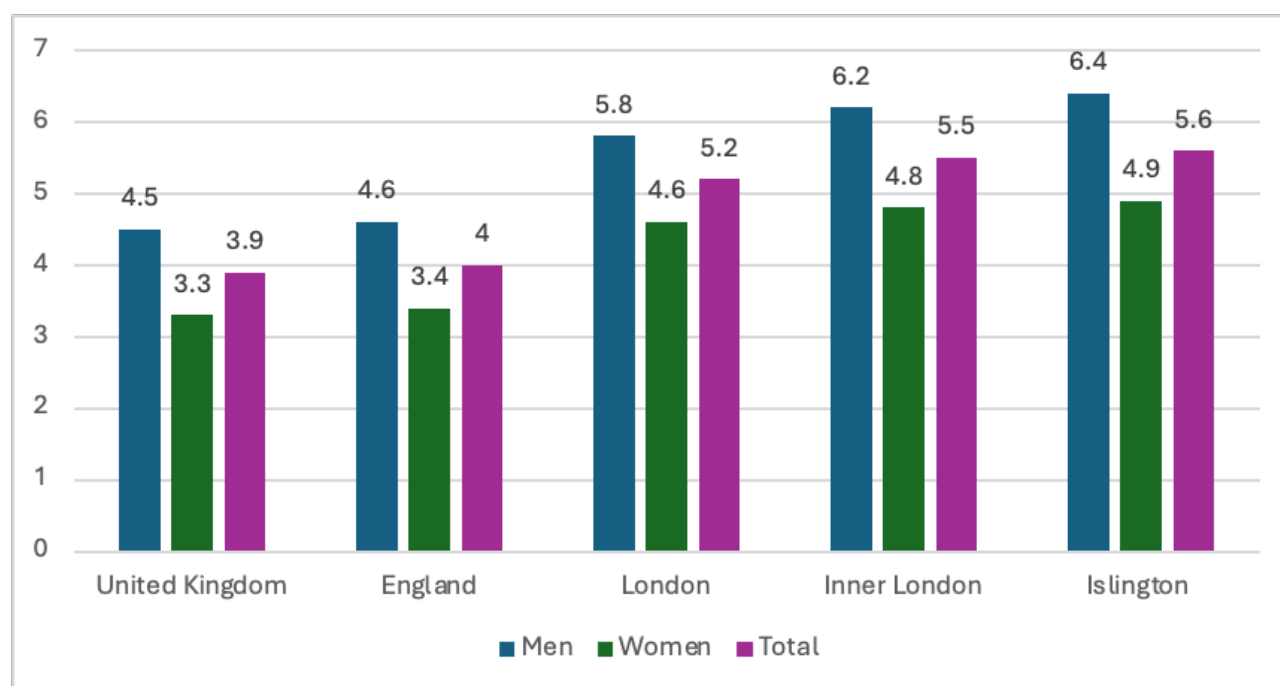
137 <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/get-support/information-for-your-situation/benefit-cap/how-much-is-the-benefit-cap>

138 Women’s Budget Group (2024) *Who bears the brunt? Intersectional analysis of social security cuts since 2010*, WBG, https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Who-bears-the-brunt_WBG-June-2024-1.pdf

2.9.2. Unemployment and Welfare Claimants in Islington

LBI had a model-based level of unemployment for 2023 of 5%, which identical to the regional average for London, both being slightly higher than the Great Britain rate of 3.7%. Turning to the claimant count (**Figure 12**), defined as those claiming in-work and out-of-work benefits¹³⁹, we can see that Islington has a proportion of claimants comparable with the Inner London average, and slightly above the London and – to a greater extent - national averages. Analysis of the trend data confirms that this has been the case for the last 3-4 years.

Figure 12: Claimant Count by Geography (ONS) May 2024



The number of people in Islington claiming UC who are out of work is 18,516, compared to 8,705 in work, meaning nearly 32% of UC claimants are in work¹⁴⁰. There are in addition 7,622 people claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – a benefit that is claimed by people with long-term health conditions. **Research from 2023 suggests that in Islington 1 in 20 people claiming UC have been sanctioned**¹⁴¹.

139 <https://cy.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/claimantcountbyunitaryandlocalauthorityexperimental>

140 DWP Stats Xplore: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml> (May 2024).

141 <https://www.ec1echo.co.uk/one-in-20-universal-credit-claimants-sanctioned-in-islington/>

2.9.3. Evidence from Citizens Advice Islington

Information received from CAI on claimants who are working provides insights into how the welfare system is creating hardship and unequal impacts. Firstly, there is evidence that mixed age couples are being forced onto UC, leading to increased work conditionality for the partner that is under pension age and significantly poorer benefit income than they would have received under their legacy benefits. Secondly, the **DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) are using incorrect earnings figures for those on ZHCs or with fluctuating hours, which can adversely affect the amount of benefit received**. Thirdly, the Minimum Income Floor impacts the self-employed, which can lead to a requirement to find additional work, work search conditionality problems and the threat of sanctions. Finally, claimants migrating from ESA legacy benefit to UC can be erroneously required to go through a Work Capability Assessment again, leading to stress and destitution.

2.9.4. Unequal Impacts in Islington

Wider research in Islington further reveals the unequal impacts of welfare reform. A survey from 2017 showed that **16,700 Islington children (45% of the total) are raised in families that are heavily dependent on benefits, the second highest proportion of any UK LA area**¹⁴². Women tend to manage household finances and bear the brunt of childcare (90% of lone parents are women) and managing the impacts of household income reductions.

In terms of **disability**, 26,000 working age people in the borough are registered disabled and 51.2% are out of work. The majority are in receipt of UC or ESA. Research shows that **one third of employed people with disabilities in the LBI worked in health and social care and a further 16% in catering**¹⁴³. The same report found that key problems for disabled residents included a lack of awareness and support by employers and associated issues of stigma and stereotyping¹⁴⁴. Fear of losing benefits is also a barrier for disabled people in terms of taking up employment opportunities¹⁴⁵. Wider issues of stigma faced by welfare claimants has been picked up by the Islington Taskforce on Inequality who refer to claimants enduring ‘repeated indignities and hostility from those with power’¹⁴⁶.

In terms of **ethnicity**, Islington also has the highest proportion of people from minoritised ethnic groups claiming benefits on the basis of disability and sickness in London, and a particularly high proportion of these claimants (over half) are experiencing mental health problems. **In research findings, poor health (mental and physical) emerged as perhaps the most significant barrier to accessing work**. Focus group participants reported physical health problems, especially back pain, often linked directly to heavy lifting and long hours standing in previous low paid employment as chefs, kitchen porters and care workers¹⁴⁷. Finally, many ethnically minoritised residents reported a widespread lack of trust and fear of the Job Centre, based on negative experiences of the threat of sanctions, actual cuts to benefits, and the pressure imposed on them to take unsuitable work (this was especially prevalent amongst the Bangladeshi and Algerian focus group participants).

142 Cripplegate Foundation (2022) *Invisible Islington Living in Poverty in Inner London*, https://cripplegate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Invisible_Islington.pdf.

143 Lewis J et al (2023) Islington disability and long-term health conditions employment project, London Metropolitan University, p25.

144 Lewis et al (2023).

145 Lewis et al (2023), p32

146 Islington Taskforce on Inequality (2023) <https://www.islington.gov.uk/~media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/communications/qualityandperformance/surveys/20222023/islington-inequality-taskforcefinal-71122.pdf> p12

147 Lewis et al (2022) Islington Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Employment Research Project, Islington Council and London Metropolitan University <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/IslingtonBAMEEmploymentFinalReport1%20%282%29.pdf>



2.10. Conclusions

In this part of the report, we have reviewed available statistical evidence and secondary sources on seven work-based harms that are a feature of LBI's labour market. While some of the statistical estimates need to be treated with caution due a lack of data at lower levels of geography, others can be considered reliable. These caveats aside, what emerges from our analysis is the finding that exposure to one or more work-based harms is a routine experience for a significant minority of both Islington residents and (even more so) workers.

Firstly, low pay (by the regional measure) affects a significant minority of Islington residents (16-21%) and is more prevalent for women, compared to men. In terms of workers, using regional level data, we can see that low pay is extremely high (35-45%) in some of Islington's key employment sectors (such as Retail and Accommodation and Food), again, especially for women.

Secondly, while there is a dearth of local data on paid annual leave and Statutory Sick Pay, applying national estimates to Islington suggests the number of affected residents and workers would be around 4,000 for the former and 6,000 for the latter.

Thirdly, we have shown that the non-fatal injury rate for Islington is lower than the national and London averages, but somewhat above that for Inner London. However, the rate for Accommodation and Food Service is somewhat above the sectoral average. Mental health harms are higher in London than the national average.

Fourthly, while the number of Islington residents on ZHCs is quite low, their usage is very high (based on national figures) for certain key industries in Islington like Accommodation and Food and Health and Social Care. Part-time working is also high in these sectors, and in Administrative and Support Services and Retail (based on London averages). There is no adequate measure of bogus self-employment, but estimating on the basis of previous research suggests this could affect as many as 2,000 Islington residents.

Fifthly, Islington has a low gender pay gap, but London has high levels of workplace sexual harassment. The employment rates of certain minoritised groups (Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black/Black British) are low in Islington and based on London-wide data pay levels are lower for all minoritised groups (compared to White British).

Sixthly, union membership in Islington is very low compared to national figures and estimates suggest that the borough has had one of the worst rates of decline over the last two decades.

Finally, while unemployment in Islington is only somewhat above the regional average, we have presented evidence that shows that as many as 26,000 residents are affected by welfare conditionality and that women, disabled and ethnically minoritised residents are particularly negatively impacted.

For all of seven harms we have also presented local examples provided by CAI and highlighted evidence that particular minoritised and migrant groups in the borough (such as those from Latin American and Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds) are disproportionately affected.

3. Part 3: How does the Council Partner with Unions to Promote Good Work?

Part 3 looks at how the council might partner with unions to promote good work and explores union perspectives on the challenges of organising.

- **Section 3.1 introduces our methodology for this part of the report.**
- **Section 3.2 explores union perspectives on working with Islington Council,** noting aspects of best practice and further potential developments.
- **Section 3.3 looks at union perspectives on work-based harms,** going beyond the statistical overview in Part 2 to look at particular industries, jobs and the mechanisms that generate harm.
- **Section 3.4 briefly notes union organising success stories in the borough,** which have achieved improved terms and conditions for Islington residents and workers (a full description can be found in Appendix 6.2)
- **Section 3.5 explores key barriers to union organising** (ranging from high turnover to language barriers and available resources). This provides insights into the kinds of support unions need.
- **Section 3.6 examines case studies of unions engaging with so-called ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers,** exploring key examples in and around Islington from Unite and the IWGB.
- **Section 3.7 examines the role Islington Trades Union Council could play in supporting unionisation in the borough,** noting resource limitations and exploring potential strategies.
- **Section 3.8 summarises the findings of Part 3.**

3.1. Introduction

In this part of the report, **we explore the role of unions in the borough**, including the way the Council works with unions, union perspectives on work-based harms, challenges around unionisation and the role of Islington Trades Union Council (ITUC). This is **based on the findings from our discussions with 24 union officials and lay representatives from two focus groups and 12 individual interviews**. In total 21 of the participants represented 9 TUC-affiliated unions (TSSA, Unite, UCU, CWU, RMT, Unison, NEU, GMB, Usdaw) – a number of which were also delegates to ITUC, two represented ‘independent’ unions (IWGB and ACORN), and one an organisation that promotes and supports unionisation (Organise Now!). The information they relayed to us is very much skewed towards the sectors they represent, but overall sufficiently cover hospitality, courier services, business support services (cleaning and security), and retail, as well as some insights into working conditions in education, social care and local government.

Firstly, in **section 3.2** we provide an overview of union perspectives on Islington Council, what the LA is perceived to be doing well, followed by those areas where unions believe the Council could be playing more of a role. Secondly, in **section 3.3**, we examine unions' perspectives on work-based harms. This takes us beyond the largely statistical overview in **Part 2** of the report, exploring in more detail particular industries, workplaces and the mechanisms that generate harm. We then briefly review examples of union success stories in the borough in **section 3.4**, which are demonstrative of the impact unions can have in challenging work-based harms and promoting good work. Nevertheless, we cannot underestimate the challenges unions and in **section 3.5** we consider barriers to unionisation. In the two final subsections we review case studies from Unite and the IWGB on unionising so-called 'difficult-to-organise' workers (**section 3.6**), and on the role ITUC could play in supporting unionisation in the borough (**section 3.7**).

3.2. Engaging with Islington Council

In this first section we explore the views of union officials and representatives around Islington Council.

3.2.1. Best Practice

Firstly, **we note that Islington Council has a strong track record of passing motions supportive of trade unions**, including supporting public sector workers' pay claims¹⁴⁸, encouraging local people to join a union¹⁴⁹, working with unions to develop community campaigns challenging insecure work¹⁵⁰, and protecting the right to strike¹⁵¹.

A CWU official also noted that the fact that Islington Council were commissioning this research was an important statement of intent and seemed to represent a more substantive commitment to involving unions in challenging labour exploitation and promoting good work than other local authorities:

It is just interesting that Islington are commissioning this work to go ahead, because it is way more in depth than a lot of other local authorities are doing. With most of them, it is [just] sign a charter.

Secondly, those unions which directly represent workers employed by the Council emphasised the very good working relationship between themselves and the LA. A GMB representative pointed to the recent signing of a Partnership Agreement between the Council, GMB, Unison and Unite, which commits the parties to open engagement, a collaborative approach and protects union facility time. The GMB also noted that they had access to staff inductions for the purposes of recruitment and they enjoyed regular meetings with Council's elected leadership.

148 <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=4296&Ver=4>

149 <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=4059&Ver=4>

150 <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=4297&Ver=4>

151 <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=4560&Ver=4>

From a Unison perspective the union were pleased with much of the progress that the Council has made on in-sourcing over the last decade or more (discussed further below) and this includes bringing back in-house cleaners in 2011, social housing in 2012¹⁵² and 2022¹⁵³ and waste services in 2012¹⁵⁴. Unison also believed they have had a good level of engagement with the elected leadership of the Council over the last decade or so.

Thirdly, in terms of wider actions that Islington Council has taken to promote unionisation, **we can point to the unprecedented partnership that was undertaken with the Trades Union Congress to promote unions and a safe return to work on 500 noticeboards across LBI at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic**¹⁵⁵. The Council has also worked very productively with the community union ACORN, agreeing to regularly meet with ACORN as part of their Housing Charter, and to signpost private renters in the borough to the union via its website¹⁵⁶. For ourselves the latter is a very important development and a model of how the Council could work to promote traditional workplace unions to Islington residents.

3.2.2. Potential Developments

While, as noted, Unison were pleased with some of the in-sourcing that has taken place at the Council, from their perspective there are still gaps, ‘Unfortunately, things they didn’t bring in [which] we would like to have seen was leisure, and obviously, care, that’s a bigger one’. The union also pointed to the fact that the Council have not fully implemented the Ethical Care Charter, 11 years on from it being signed, with just under 70% of domiciliary care companies paying (for example) occupational sick pay. Unison did recognise however some of the challenges in implementing the Care Charter for very small businesses that provided other forms of social value.

The Unison representative also believed that **the Council could be more pro-active in promoting unions to care workers and building this into its procurement policies**. However, this would have to go beyond simply giving a union the right to send literature to care workers and could entail bringing care workers together in a forum where the union could actively speak to them. Providing catering could make such an event attractive to care workers and the opportunity could also be taken to signpost the workers to other services and forms of support.

For Unite, their priority is also in-sourcing, ‘so the local authority can actually take direct control so that services aren’t being prioritised for profit and everything else that comes from it’. Unite also noted (speaking generally) that in-sourcing alone was not enough, and that local authorities also needed to improve the terms and conditions of those workers who had been in-sourced.

At the same time, **Unite is keen to promote its Fair Hospitality Charter**¹⁵⁷ **that seeks to provide a baseline for good quality work in the hospitality sector, including the Real Living Wage, paid rest breaks, guaranteed hours, 100% of tips and safe transport options home for those working beyond 11pm**. A Unite official explained that local authorities taking a lead on these issues can be really important because ‘there are employers who want to do the right thing, [but] who won’t listen to a union. They will listen to the [...] Government, they will listen to, you know, [the] Council’.

152 Wellman A (2012) ‘Council takes back housing as ALMO closes’, 3rd April, *Inside Housing*, <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/council-takes-back-housing-as-almo-closes-31173>

153 Dean M (2022) ‘After 16 years of PFI, control of homes is taken back “in house”’, 14th April, *Islington Tribune*, <https://www.islingtontribune.co.uk/article/after-16-years-of-pfi-control-of-homes-is-taken-back-in-house>

154 Date W (2012) ‘Islington to take waste collection service in-house’, 12th July, *Lets Recycle*, <https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/islington-to-take-waste-collection-service-in-house/>

155 Islington Council (2020) ‘TUC and Islington Council stand together to promote safe return to work’, 1st July, <https://www.islington.media/news/tuc-and-islington-council-stand-together-to-promote-safe-return-to-work>

156 <https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/private-sector-housing/private-rented-accommodation>

157 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/5560/unionvision-charter-leaflet.pdf>

Unite were also interested in what additional work the LA could take on around labour market enforcement, particularly in relation to health and safety. While aware of the cuts that have taken place that mitigate against local authorities' ability to be as proactive as they may wish to be, Unite felt this was important due to the number of workers who may be too intimidated to come forward and report unsafe working conditions themselves. Finally, like most representatives we spoke to, Unite also emphasised the importance of local authorities 'making a clear statement to people about the value and the worth of joining trade unions'.

The CWU official also highlighted the importance of promoting trade unions, and coupled this with an emphasis on employment rights, which they suggested could be delivered through schools, 'I think [it's] the biggest thing we could do as a society, if we can push for it'. They noted that in their previous employment their colleagues, who were mostly young workers, 'none of them knew what a trade union was. Literally not a clue because their parents weren't in unions. Most of them wouldn't have even had grandparents who were in unions'. The importance of education around trade unions was also identified by an Usdaw official.

The issues around a lack of knowledge of unions is a point we also explore below (section 3.5.4), and there is a great deal of research that reveals low levels of understanding of employment rights amongst the population¹⁵⁸. This is also somewhere where **there is potential for the Council to intervene in the coordinating role it plays in relation to Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in the LBI, potentially drawing on existing resources such as Unite in Schools**¹⁵⁹. As the CWU official acknowledged, 'schools have such tight budgets', but nonetheless argued that if local authorities were offering training packages and relevant material, it would be taken up. This is a point we return to in **Part 4** of the report (sections 4.5.2 and 4.5.3) when we explore LA policy levers in more detail.

3.3. Work- Based Harms

In this next section we build on our analyses in **Part 2** of the report through exploring union perspectives on work-based harms in the borough (and in some cases London more generally), examining industries, workplaces and mechanisms.

3.3.1. Pay

A former Unite hospitality activist discussed the increasing number of campaigns the union had been involved in over unfair tipping policies in high street restaurants, (TGI Fridays¹⁶⁰, Pizza Express¹⁶¹, Ping Pong¹⁶², Las Iguanas¹⁶³, Turtle Bay¹⁶⁴, amongst others). In many instances the union believed this has resulted from employers seeking to maintain the pay differentials for kitchen staff as increases to the national minimum wage has pushed up overall workforce costs.

158 <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/awareness-knowledge-and-exercise-individual-employment-rights>

159 <https://www.unite-theunion.org/why-join/membership-types/community-membership/unite-in-schools>

160 Butler S (2018) 'TGI Fridays staff to hold UK's first strike over tips', *The Guardian*, 4th May, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/may/04/tgi-fridays-staff-to-hold-uks-first-strike-over-tips>

161 Butler S (2022) 'Pizza Express waiting staff win back bigger slice of tips', 1st April, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/01/pizza-express-waiting-staff-win-back-bigger-slice-of-tips>

162 Butler S (2024) 'London restaurant chain adds "branch charge" as it bans tipping by card', 4th April, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/apr/04/restaurant-chain-bans-diners-from-using-card-payments-to-tip-staff>

163 Bachelor L (2015) 'Las Iguanas faces backlash over "grossly unfair" tipping policy', 29th August, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/aug/29/las-iguanas-tipping-policy-change-staff-diners>

164 Witts S (2016) 'Catering staff union to tackle "unfair" tipping policies with MPs', 18th January, *Restaurant Online*, <https://www.restaurantonline.co.uk/Article/2016/01/18/Catering-staff-union-to-tackle-unfair-tipping-policies-with-MPs>

Another issue in hospitality was workers having to pay for their own uniforms. Unite has supported workers to bring claims for illegal non-payment of the minimum wage due to this issue. A different Unite official discussed ‘unpaid trial shifts’ in hospitality, which the union has also repeatedly raised with the Low Pay Commission¹⁶⁵.

A member of Unite Community and a former hotel worker in the LBI pointed to **the prevalence of ‘task and finish’ type contracts for hotel cleaners, whereby workers are paid to clean a certain number of rooms, but the time allocation is often unrealistic, leading to unpaid overtime**. Another Unite representative pointed to the example of Latin American cleaners having their hours systematically under-recorded, leading to pay below the LLW.

An Usdaw official noted that shopworkers often faced system errors in relation to the recording of overtime, and while employers would pay the wages owed once the problem was identified, this could be a time-consuming process and could leave workers in temporary hardship.

A Unison representative told us that despite the Council’s progress on procurement for domiciliary care in the borough (as part of the Ethical Care Charter), there were still care home providers that refused to sign up to the LLW (notably Care UK¹⁶⁶).

The RMT official told us that while his union has won the LLW for some of the outsourced contracts on London transport, there was now a tendency for those companies to remove all other benefits (such as overtime and shift allowances) above the standard hourly rate¹⁶⁷. The RMT official also noted that there was a propensity for companies to delay the implementation of the LW to the last possible moment¹⁶⁸.

It is also worth emphasising – as noted by the representative from Organise Now! – that ‘living in London on the London Living Wage in a borough like Islington is still not easy’. Indeed, many of those we spoke to emphasised the very high costs of living in the borough, which make it difficult to conceptualise a ‘living wage’ in terms of a Greater London average (let alone national average). **The Usdaw official stated that the LLW was ‘insultingly low’, that it was ‘not a living wage’ and while ‘you won’t starve, it’s not enough to raise a family on’.**

3.3.2. Differential Entitlements

Differential access to employment benefits is strongly linked to the form of employment relationship and whether individuals are categorised as ‘employees’, ‘workers’ or self-employed (especially where this relates to statutory entitlements). Therefore, we also discuss these issues under ‘employment insecurity’ (section 3.3.4), as many of the examples that were reported to us fall into this category.

Nonetheless, statutory entitlements are only one part of the story, with the use of subcontracting and various forms of employment intermediaries (agencies) also being used to hire workers on differential terms and conditions. For example, **an RMT official told us that some of the companies providing subcontracted security guards and cleaners on the London transport system did not offer company sick pay and described those workers as ‘super exploited’.**

165 Low Pay Commission (2021) *Non-compliance and enforcement of the National Minimum Wage: A report by the Low Pay Commission*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-wage-underpayment-in-2021/non-compliance-and-enforcement-of-the-national-minimum-wage-a-report-by-the-low-pay-commission>

166 Citizens UK (2022) ‘Community leaders gather outside five major care provider headquarters to call for a real Living Wage for care workers’, <https://www.citizensuk.org/about-us/news/citizens-uk-community-leaders-gather-outside-five-major-care-provider-headquarters-to-call-for-a-real-living-wage-for-care-workers/>

167 Information on RMT’s in-sourcing campaign with regard to TFL can be found here: <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/rmt-demands-tfl-end-outsourcing-now/>

168 The rates are typically announced in October and companies have until the 1st of May to implement: <https://livingwage.org.uk/faqs>

A Unison representative noted that not all domiciliary care workers in Islington were being employed by companies that offered occupational sick pay (a requirement of the Ethical Care Charter), which was particularly problematic in the context of the pandemic. Also, an Usdaw official noted that at one major supermarket chain occupational sick pay was related to length of service. In addition, this official has to deal with large number of cases where sick pay was stopped due to supposed violations of the terms by his members (in many cases these were successfully challenged).

3.3.3. Health and Safety

In terms of health and safety a Unite official explained that there were concerns around working conditions in warehouses across northeast London:

It's the number of hours that people are working as well. It's what equipment they're using. And a lot of these workers will be involved in warehouses where there's food, where there are freezers, it's how long they're spending in the freezers and how long they're spending in that environment.

The RMT also expressed concerns around facilities used by subcontracted staff on the London transport system ('we've had cold winters and they're working and they're without heating systems, broken heaters').

A major concern for Usdaw was the risk of violence in the retail sector; they have a longstanding campaign aimed at raising awareness and challenging this issue¹⁶⁹. The official raised specific concerns around lone working in smaller convenience stores and petrol stations, and around the high risk of armed robberies. Moreover, **there was a sense that businesses had been cutting back on hiring security guards due to the state of the economy**, and that police do not always prioritise shoplifting. The official explained that they would be contacted by members on a regular basis who are 'too scared to go to work'. Moreover, while the large retail employers are very clear in their HR policies that staff are not to pursue shoplifters (due to the risk of violence), sometimes local managers give out a different message.

The IWGB national officer referred to the potentially dangerous working conditions of couriers on the roads ('risking their lives every day on the road') while also facing **abuse from other motorists and members of the public** ('You just get used to it. You think being called whatever words under the sun is just part of your day at work').

3.3.4. Employment Insecurity

On the question of employment insecurity, union officials and lay representatives described a wide range of different employment relationships and their impacts upon workers. In the case of ZHCs, one former Unite hospitality activist explained how they **give enormous power to individual managers, who can control whether or not workers earn enough to make ends meet**.

Scarcely better is the situation of subcontracted cleaning workers on London transport as relayed to us by an RMT official. Some of them are on '336 hour contracts' where effectively only one day's work per week is guaranteed (averaged over the course of one year) and workers are reliant upon flexing up to achieve a wage they can live off.

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

While in retail many workers are on contracts that guarantee minimum or fixed hours, employers often have the ability to change these; an Usdaw official described cases where the new hours offered did not take account of their members' caring commitments or health needs, and that in one **case a woman employed by a supermarket for 34 years had been dismissed over her inability to work a different rota (the union won back her job on appeal)**.

We also spoke to an NEU member who worked in schools through an agency. She was employed through an umbrella company¹⁷⁰, where she is liable for the employer's national insurance contributions, 'and all these kinds of extras'. The school would not move her to a more secure contract as they would have to pay a 'buy out fee' to the agency. NEU representatives ascribed this situation to funding for schools being 'so tight', exacerbated locally by falling enrolments.

A Unite member from construction noted that umbrella contracts were also common in his sector:

I worked for an umbrella company, eight or nine years ago, and I wouldn't want to go through that again. Because [...] you're paying for the privilege of having a payslip, basically. That's what umbrella companies, payroll companies are.

Unite have previously contested such arrangements as being what they **term 'bogus self-employment'**¹⁷¹, in the sense that **it simply transfers some of the employer's usual obligations onto the worker**.

The IWGB also campaign around these issues which they describe as the 'misclassification of worker status', encompassing 'workers in precarious occupations, the gig economy, outsourced work, [and] foster care workers'. One of their national officers told us these arrangements are often about 'stripping people of rights and paying them as little as possible'.

3.3.5. Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying

A former Unite activist from hospitality explained that sexual harassment was rife in the sector. She recalled working in a chain bar where at the start of every shift the manager would line up the young women working there and judge their appearance in a highly sexually objectifying manner¹⁷². A representative from Organise Now! also noted how sexual harassment featured prominently in the cases that came through to them, as well as 'typical' hospitality stuff of low pay, wage theft [and] bullying'.

A Unite official representing **hospitality** discussed these concerns in relation to their union's campaign for safe transport home options at the end of late shifts¹⁷³, noting that **workers in this industry experienced a lot of street-based harassment**. A different Unite representative reported that she had been aware of sexual harassment issues faced by Latin American women working as cleaners in north and east London.

170 <https://neu.org.uk/advice/member-groups/supply-staff/alternatives-agencies/umbrella-and-limited-companies>

171 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2019/december/unite-set-for-first-hearing-in-legal-battle-over-bogus-self-employment-with-construction-firm-munnelly-group>

172 The most comprehensive research on the matter suggests that this is not atypical: <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/33597/>

173 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/get-me-home-safely-campaign>

Turning to detriments experienced on the basis of ethnicity or migration status, an RMT official explained that restrictive annual leave policies for subcontracted cleaning and security staff on the transport system (only being able to take up to two weeks at once) disproportionately impacted workers with a migrant background. These workers were likely to want to travel back to their countries of origin for more extended periods to maintain links with their families.

More generally that official saw **the disproportionate employment of workers of colour and/or migrant backgrounds in subcontracted roles on poorer terms and conditions as a form of 'institutional discrimination'**. A similar situation was described by a former Unite hospitality activist, who noted how migrant workers were often confined to 'back-of-house' roles (such as in the kitchen).

The IWGB official told us about disputes their union had supported involving outsourced night cleaners in the LBI; they were predominantly of Latin American backgrounds and had been subject to bullying, harassment and unfair dismissals¹⁷⁴. The IWGB also told us about pervasive negative attitudes towards gig economy couriers in London, who are often people of colour and/or of a migrant background. The nature of their work means they have to congregate in the street (waiting for orders) and this led to complaints, which could lead to account terminations. **From the IWGB's perspective the 'animosity' couriers face and their exploitative working conditions are mutually reinforcing** (their low social status justifies their poor terms and conditions, their poor terms and conditions confirms their low status) **and factor in the abuse and attacks they experience**.

A Unite representative further commented that some of the 'gig economy' delivery drivers who may have an irregular migration status, have 'zero capacity to complain, because they're off all records and they don't want to draw attention to themselves'.

3.3.6. Denial of Worker Voice

A Unite official discussed the challenges of attempting to organise workers of Turkish and Kurdish origin given the contractual insecurity they were subject to: 'So there's that to deal with. How do we get over that hurdle? Their employment position is extremely precarious. These are the precariat. They can be dismissed within minutes'.

In addition to the insecurity of contractual arrangements, historically **Turkish and Kurdish migrant workers in the UK have also been made precarious through their immigration status, tied to the Ankara Agreement¹⁷⁵ and the new Turkish Worker Visa**. Both schemes limit the work that can be undertaken and tie a visa to a particular business/employer. In the view of one official this could amount to 'bonded labour. You can't change your employer. So, it's great for employers who can, on the basis of that, treat workers extremely badly'. In his view the schemes had also long been a factor in workers' fears of joining a union.

¹⁷⁴ Haynes O (2022) 'City University cleaners campaign against outsourcing', 24th March, *Islington Now*, <https://islingtonnow.co.uk/city-university-taken-to-the-cleaners/>

¹⁷⁵ Which lasted up until Britain left the European Union.

Finally, a GMB representative pointed to experiences of more explicit forms of ‘union-busting’ in supermarkets in the last twenty years, with employers producing anti-union literature and victimising members of the union. An RMT official also gave an example of a company misrepresenting the union’s position on paid overtime so as to drive a wedge between the union and the workers. More generally, in recent years union-busting tactics have been increasingly reported at employers such as McDonalds¹⁷⁶, Amazon¹⁷⁷ and Apple Stores¹⁷⁸. Further barriers to joining a union are considered below.

3.3.7. Welfare Conditionality

Following the trend towards more people in work claiming UC, senior officials from Unite informed us that there are increasing numbers of workers (including their members) who are in work claiming UC and are subject to intensive conditions and surveillance by the DWP¹⁷⁹. Elsewhere, **London Unemployed Strategies (LUS) is aiming to give voice to unemployed people** to counteract the ‘abuses and attacks made upon them by the government, the mass media and organisations such as ‘The Taxpayers Alliance’. LUS aim to work with trade unionists and welfare claimants to express their issues and needs and run ‘Stand Up for Your Rights’ workshops across London.

3.4. Success Stories

Unions in Islington are actively campaigning against the kinds of work-based harms identified in the previous section and there are a number of key success stories centred in the Borough over the last decade, which have been brought to our attention.

The following are simply headlines, but are illustrative of what unions have been able to achieve (and further information is provided in Appendix 6.2).

- The NEU led a campaign in 2014 against ZHCs, to achieve union recognition and national pay and grading at the STEM6 ‘free school’¹⁸⁰.
- UCU at City and Islington College (part of the Capital City College Group) have achieved some of the highest levels of union density in Further Education, some of the largest pay increases in the sector¹⁸¹ and a process for moving staff on precarious contracts into permanent roles¹⁸².

176 Batmaz S (2017) ‘I’m a McDonald’s worker and this is why I’m going on strike’, 3rd September, *Independent*, <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/comment/im-strike-mcdonalds-employer-tells-us-treat-burns-condiments-instead-safety-equipment-88583>

177 Smythe P (2024) ‘Amazon Says GMB Leaflets Could Be a ‘Hazard’ Amid Union-Busting Allegations’, 21st June, *Novara Media*, <https://novaramedia.com/2024/06/21/amazon-says-gmb-leaflets-could-be-a-hazard-amid-union-busting-allegations/>

178 Smythe P (2023) ‘Apple’s “Union-Busting” Tactics Have Come to the UK’, 3rd May, *Novara Media*, <https://novaramedia.com/2023/05/03/apples-union-busting-tactics-have-come-to-the-uk/>

179 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/y3xdigls/cut-sanctions-not-incomes-leaflet.pdf>

180 Garner R (2014) ‘Teachers at flagship Islington free school vote to strike over new “zero hour” job terms’, 28th January, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-at-flagship-islington-free-school-vote-to-strike-over-new-zero-hour-job-terms-9089009.html>

181 FE News (2022) ‘Staff at Capital City College Group win significant pay deal’, 11th July, <https://www.fenews.co.uk/work-leadership/staff-at-capital-city-college-group-win-significant-pay-deal/>

182 Vernell S and Grundle C (2018) ‘Historic deal at CCCG’, *UCU Left*, <https://uculeft.org/historic-deal-at-cccg/>



- The GMB have won recognition for traffic wardens outsourced via NSL. This was subsequently followed by an increase in pay worth 40%¹⁸³. Other examples for GMB include winning recognition and the LLW for security personnel at Arsenal Football Club¹⁸⁴, and alongside Usdaw and Unite, campaigning for the LLW in supermarkets.
- Unison have played an important role in terms of campaigning around LA in-sourcing, their Ethical Care Charter¹⁸⁵, and for the rights of Teaching Assistants.
- Unite have achieved an inflation beating pay rise at homeless charity St Mungo's, 2023¹⁸⁶, following an earlier successful action by workers at Shelter¹⁸⁷. Unite have also won in-sourcing campaigns in the neighbouring London Borough of Hackney¹⁸⁸. In hospitality, Unite has campaigned against unfair tip policies and influenced national legislation¹⁸⁹.
- Unite have also been very active in terms of challenging welfare reforms and are running a national campaign, 'Cut Sanctions, Not Incomes'¹⁹⁰.
- The RMT have won the LLW for outsourced cleaners, security and catering staff across London transport and national rail contracts and recently won free staff travel for the lowest paid workers on the Transport for London (TfL) network¹⁹¹. They continue to win pay increases for directly employed staff on London Underground¹⁹² and mainline rail services.
- Community union ACORN has recently developed a branch covering Islington, taking referrals from Help on Your Doorstep, engaging in advocacy around housing repairs and undertaking member defence campaigns (around unfair eviction).

183 GMB (2023) 'Islington Traffic Wardens win bumper 40 per cent pay rise', 13th October, <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/islington-traffic-wardens-win-bumper-40-per-cent-pay-rise>

184 GMB (2020) 'GMB London welcomes the decision by Arsenal Football Club to sign a recognition agreement with the union', 11th November, <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-london-welcomes-the-decision-by-arsenal-football-club-to-sign-a-recognition-agreement-with-the-union>, Lamche A (2023) 'Now agency workers at Emirates Stadium on match days score London Living Wage', *Islington Tribune*, <https://www.islingtontribune.co.uk/article/now-agency-workers-at-emirates-stadium-on-match-days-score-london-living-wage>

185 <https://www.unison.org.uk/care-workers-your-rights/the-ethical-care-charter/>

186 Unite (2023) 'Unite secures inflation beating pay deal to end long running strike at St Mungo's charity', 25th August, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/august/unite-secures-inflation-beating-pay-deal-to-end-long-running-strike-at-st-mungo-s-charity>

187 Unite (2023) 'Shelter pay dispute ends as workers receive improved offer', 12th January, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/january/shelter-pay-dispute-ends-as-workers-receive-improved-offer>

188 Unite (2021) 'Hackney parking wardens seek pay justice in last year of outsourcer's contract', 5th July, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2021/july/hackney-parking-wardens-seek-pay-justice-in-last-year-of-outsourcer-s-contract>

189 Unite (2024) 'Fresh delays to fair tips legislation slated by Unite', 24th April, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2024/april/fresh-delays-to-fair-tips-legislation-slated-by-unite>
<https://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/unite-against-sanctions>

191 Smythe P (2023) 'Free Travel Is Being Used to Make Outsourced Transport Staff Work Harder', 27th September, *Novara Media*, <https://novaramedia.com/2023/09/27/free-travel-is-being-used-to-make-outsourced-transport-staff-work-harder/>

192 <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/members-updates/rates-of-pay-and-conditions-of-service-2023-lul081123/>

3.5. Barriers to Organising

Nevertheless, a core contention of this research is that unions face multiple barriers in attempting to organise workers who are at the sharp end of labour abuses. In this section we explore those challenges in greater depth from the perspective of the unions themselves, which also offers insights into the forms of support unions require.

3.5.1. Size of the Workforces/Workplaces

One of the most obvious challenges for unions is trying to organise workers in companies that are almost entirely un-unionised and employ very large numbers of people. Perhaps the most extreme example of this would be the platform food delivery sector, where the various companies can draw upon thousands of workers across London at relatively short notice to cover any strike action. On the other hand, a Unite official – giving the examples of shops and restaurants – explained that very small workplaces can also be a challenge due to close levels of supervision: '[unionising is] going to be frowned upon, to put it lightly, [...], putting your job at risk'. A UCU representative also saw a predominance of smaller workplaces as a factor underpinning lower levels of unionisation in the LBL.

3.5.2. High Turnover

High turnover as a challenge for unionisation was referred to by many officials and representatives. The IWGB national officer stated this in the following terms:

Especially with these workers who are predominantly migrant, some of them go back to their countries of origin, they move onto different jobs, and all these kinds of things. Quite quickly, because of the churn, you'll be left with a low density.

The RMT official noted the same issue, explaining that a lot of subcontracted workers on the London transport system are 'seasonal workers, a lot of students who usually take up the jobs, and because of that they have an ever-revolving workforce and it's really difficult to organise them'. A Unite representative noted the same issue in the hotel sector, stating that workers might move quite rapidly between working in different hotels.

A different Unite representative specifically linked high turnover in unorganised industries to the high cost of living in places like Islington:

[...] people who are at the real sharp end of cost of living, who are mostly sofa surfing, it's hard to keep in touch with them, they change jobs quite often.

Many others made this connection, including an official from the community union ACORN. He explained that because of both the transient nature of work and 'the housing situation is so bad, because renting is so precarious, people move once a year'. For his union the solution was to ensure they built branches of the union in each borough to ensure that members can stay involved even as they move from place to place.

3.5.3. Lack of Access and the Fear Factor

While every worker in the UK has the right to join a trade union, and groups of workers can apply for voluntary or force statutory recognition of their union, **there is no positive right of access for unions to enter workplaces for the purposes of recruitment**¹⁹³. This was an issue that was identified by a GMB representative who told us that there have been occasions when union representatives have been ‘literally [...] escorted out by the security guards’.

However, **even where unions have been able to access workers, they have to confront the high levels of precarity, insecurity and sometimes intimidation, that make workers unable to engage**. This was mentioned by a Unison representative in relation to social care workers, and a Unite official in relation to Kurdish and Turkish workers. Such fears are often well-founded: a former Unite hospitality activist pointed to examples where union activists at a restaurant chain had been subjected to disciplinary procedures and even sacked, simply for trying to organise a union.

3.5.4. Lack of Knowledge of Trade Unions

A number of interviewees made the same point as the CWU official above who was referring to the potential role of the Council in educating people about unions. For example, **an NEU delegate to ITUC pointed out that younger people** (‘mainly friends of my kids, they work in technology, and IT, [...] and they work in pubs, and bars, and restaurants’), who are statistically much less likely to be in a union¹⁹⁴ **are actually interested in unions, but don’t know how they can engage**. A Unite official noted that the general awareness of trade unions is in decline, and people are less and less likely to have parents or even grandparents who had been in a union (‘Like, it is dying out unless we regenerate that’). A representative from the union campaigning group Organise Now! made the same point, in explaining why their organisation (which we explore further below) was necessary:

‘People don’t have a trade union aunt or uncle they can call. [...] [A]t least [an] increasingly large numbers of working-class people don’t have those connections anymore’.

3.5.5. Engagement with Members

Because of the many challenges around organising workers in these precarious sectors, the national officer from the IWGB noted the importance of **having to secure an understanding amongst members that quick wins are not always achievable, especially when faced with the resources of a multinational business**. There is therefore a need for a high level of engagement with members to take action to secure achievable wins and build confidence, while also communicating an understanding that ‘one of the last things to go, if not the last thing, will be pay’.

Relatedly, a Unite former hospitality activist and a current Unite official both cautioned against short-term approaches; workers are quickly organised, take strike action and potentially win some publicity for their cause, but unions fail to build sustainable structures that will secure new membership and wins for the longer term.

193 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-06-04/debates/EED47F5D-5EA5-48F1-BB3A-0CD255E77AE9/TradeUnionAccessToWorkplaces>

194 TUC (2020) *The missing half million*, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/missing-half-million>

A slightly different perspective was given by ACORN, who argued that unions can ‘struggle with some of the more fun and engaging bits, the creative sides of action’, and there was a need to think about how unions engaged with people in order to build a sense of community.

3.5.6. Language Barriers

A number of union representatives identified language barriers in organising what are very diverse workforces in Islington, and London more generally. The RMT official noted that the union did not have any bilingual officials in organising roles, but that he had managed to recruit some reps who were happy to translate union literature if needed. This point was also noted by the Unite official who was involved in his union’s work with the Turkish and Kurdish community in northeast London, but stressed that while this was a challenge, it was ‘not insurmountable’. However, the RMT official further noted that the high levels of linguistic diversity mean ‘you could probably focus on two or three main [languages], but again it’s still not going to cover everyone’. We return to this issue below in looking in more detail at some of the work done by Unite and the IWGB.

3.5.7. Available Resources

As a consequence of the above challenges, **attempting to unionise unorganised workers is justifiably understood by unions to be resource intensive.** A Unison lay representative in the borough for example stated – in relation his desire to undertake more union recruitment and organising in social care – that ‘I think there’s a massive lack of resources [...], because I want to organise that area, but I don’t have the time to do that level of work, because that would be quite a large level of work’. A Unite official noted the same dynamic in relation to the hospitality sector (‘it’s resource heavy’).

The contrast between unorganised sectors of the economy and those areas where the unions are already strong was made by the RMT official, who noted that if you don’t have an existing network of lay representatives in a company:

[...] it really makes it difficult to really get to know the issues because the reps are a vital part of how we operate as a union [...] they are your eyes and ears about what’s actually happening in the workplace.

Nonetheless, that same official cautioned against the risk for all unions of only focusing their resources in those areas where they are already comparably strong.

3.6. Engaging with ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers

In this section, rather than dissect all of the different strategies and tactics for engaging with ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers reported by union representatives, we briefly summarise case studies from two unions: Unite and IWGB (a fuller account is available in Appendix 6.3).

Firstly, however, **it is important to define what we mean by ‘difficult-to-organise’**. On the one hand this is directly a function of the resource implications discussed in the previous section. But on the other hand, this might also be related to unions lacking knowledge of or access to particular communities and demographics of workers, meaning that the ‘difficulty’ may be partially the result of perceptions.

3.6.1. Unite – Migrant Workers’ Branch, United Migrant Workers Education Project and Recognition at the Dalston Superstore

Unite had three projects or campaigns based in and around LBI that are pertinent to our research. The first is a **Unite branch for migrant workers** focused on northeast London and initially centred on the Turkish and Kurdish communities¹⁹⁵; this is now open to migrants of all backgrounds. In describing the development of the branch, the Unite official stressed the importance of organising around a community, rather than the traditional model of organising based on a workplace or even a single sector. Unite have grown the branch through street-leafleting, translating materials and providing advice services and training.

The second example is the **United Migrant Workers Education Project**, an alternative education initiative that delivers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and other courses targeted at largely migrant background cleaners and domestic staff and is based at Unite offices in Holborn. A unite official told us that the project offers an employment advice surgery alongside community building activities.

The third example is the organising success and recognition agreement with the famous queer venue, **Dalston Superstore**¹⁹⁶, which sits just beyond Islington’s borders in Hackney. The workers had grievances related to pay, facilities and work pressures during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to organise the workplace, the union had to explore ways of building trust with the queer community, which has not always been afforded a place within the union movement. This campaign has been a major success, with the workers and their union winning safe transport home at night for the workers (representing a significant investment by the employer), and a recognition agreement that provides a sustainable structure of workplace reps.

195 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2021/april/unite-steps-up-campaign-to-tackle-employment-abuses-of-turkishkurdish-community-in-london>

196 Erdem N and Barnett M (2022) ‘How Superstore Became a Union Bar’, 10th August, *Tribune*, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/08/dalston-superstore-unite-the-union-hospitality-work>



3.6.2. IWGB – Community Building and Courier Organising in Islington

The IWGB have a track record for supporting workers from migrant and minoritised ethnic backgrounds in precarious work situations. The union has led a number of key strikes and won the first recognition deal in the ‘gig’ economy sector¹⁹⁷. In its campaigning the IWGB stressed the importance of direct engagement with workers through community events and language lessons. The union has produced a dedicated information portal – The Migrant Workers Guide¹⁹⁸ – and has translated its Employment Rights Manual into Spanish¹⁹⁹. In addition, one of the union’s two legal teams are entirely bilingual (English and Spanish). The IWGB also seeks to build worker confidence around small wins, sometimes targeting other issues that affect gig workers’ terms and conditions, such as restaurants mistreating workers or denying them access to the toilet, or lack of parking places which leads to fines and lost earnings.

Following the murder of courier Takieddine Boudhane in LBI in 2020 during a road-rage incident²⁰⁰, the IWGB worked with the Council to deliver the **Blackstock Road Project**, an outreach project centred on predominately Algerian couriers. This led to some important successes, including signposting workers to a range of support services, fostering a sense of community (including through regular football games) and securing dedicated courier parking from the Council at Highbury Corner (‘where they can actually put mopeds while they’re going in for delivery rather than risking it on red routes’). The project encountered some challenges, but these could be overcome in future work.

We have focused on these examples from Unite and the IWGB as specific projects that have been focused in and around the LBI, have relevance to this programme of work and have been brought to our attention. However, this is not to say that other unions do not have important programmes of work with so-called ‘difficult-to-organise’ groups of workers, and elsewhere in this review we refer to the organising activities of the GMB with parking services staff, the RMT with outsourced cleaners and security staff, Unison with teaching assistants, and Usdaw with retail workers.

3.7. Engaging with the Trades Council

3.7.1. Background and Activities

Finally, in this section we explore the role of ITUC, the local representative body of the Trades Union Congress. **Trades Councils are the voice of the trade union movement in the community**, being composed of democratically elected representatives from TUC affiliated unions who either live or work in a geographic area. Trades Councils make links between trade unions and other kinds of activist, campaigning and community groups, support affiliated unions with publicity, communications and recruitment, and coordinate solidarity for unions that are in dispute²⁰¹.

197 Chapman B (2018) ‘Gig economy ruling: Couriers carrying blood for NHS win right to collective bargaining’, 1st March, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/nhs-gig-economy-couriers-blood-transfusions-union-recognition-the-doctors-laboratory-a8235446.html>

198 <https://iwgb.org.uk/en/page/mwg/>

199 <https://cdn.iwgb.org.uk/bucket/Handbook/LegalHandbook/Manualdederechoslaborales-tupago.pdf>

200 BBC News (2022) ‘Deliveroo driver murder: Man jailed for life for road-rage killing’, 25th August, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-62670584>

201 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/trades-councils-who-we-are-and-what-we-do>

We consider Trades Councils to be an incredibly important resource for the trade union movement, particularly in the context of the challenges and resource constraints described above. This belief was clearly shared by the majority of union representatives we spoke to, with one RMT official noting: ‘I’m an avid believer of trade councils as well [...], especially when it comes to community work, [...] what better way to really support campaigns than if other trade unions are all joined in together’. Speaking of ITUC specifically, a Unison representative noted while there were challenges around participation (a point we return to), the body ‘has a high profile’ and will always get behind his union’s campaigns.

Nevertheless, following the decline of union membership in recent decades some Trades Councils have struggled to attract participation and ITUC had in fact been defunct for a number of years before being re-founded in 2008. Following this, **ITUC has established a profile for supporting union disputes and hosting large public events, such as the Islington Supports the Strikes meeting in January 2023** (featuring a number of union general secretaries and Islington Council leader Kaya Comer-Schwartz)²⁰². They have also been actively campaigning around the defence of public services, ranging from local health centres to council housing.

ITUC also has a number of delegates (and indeed officers) who are elected Islington councillors, and this represents a direct link between local trade union activists and the LA. ITUC hold regular meetings, and have links with neighbouring Trades Councils in Camden, Hackney and Haringey, and a range of other activist and campaigning organisations (such as Hazards and Stand Up to Racism).

3.7.2. Challenges

An immediate challenge for Trades Councils is the limited financial basis upon which they operate; they are largely reliant upon affiliation fees from member unions, but they can also apply for small grants from the national Trades Union Congress. Officers of ITUC estimated that annual income would be a little over one thousand pounds per year; this is typical for Trades Councils in England and Wales.

In part, this income is a function of the number of branches that are affiliated (estimated at 10 to 14). Also, there may be particular issues in London where large union branches operate across many boroughs, but may not see themselves as having (or requiring) a link to any specific Trades Council. Delegates at **ITUC noted that a further issue was actually making contact with various union branches, with a GMB representative noting that ‘It’s very hard to find a directory where you can actually go through [and find the information]’.**

Perhaps even more of a challenge is the limited number of workers who are delegates to ITUC, or attend their meetings, which then limits the number of volunteers the Trades Council can draw upon to undertake work, organise events, or even attend rallies. While this is partially a function of the number of affiliated branches, a Unison representative also identified the sheer number of competing priorities for union representatives (‘I think it’s difficult when just everybody is trying to juggle what they want to go to’) and this may explain the predominance of older workers and retirees amongst Trades Council delegates. The latter point was raised by a number of interviewees and was recognised by key officers of ITUC. They explained this partially in terms of cost of housing in the borough and the fact that younger workers were more likely to have long commutes into LBI and therefore less time to engage with the Trades Council.

202 https://www.facebook.com/IslingtonTradesUnionCouncil/videos/712822463760709?locale=sq_AL

Some union representatives did note that there were also concerns that Trades Councils (not specifically in relation to ITUC) are 'moribund' and can 'be talking shops'. On the latter point, one representative was keen to point to the fact that in their union they have **a rule of keeping the 'action-to-meetings' ratio at 50:50: for every one hour of meetings they agree to undertake an hour of 'action', be that leafleting and recruiting members or campaigning and holding demonstrations.**

3.7.3. ITUC Strategies for Increasing Unionisation in the Borough

Delegates of ITUC have expressed a desire to do more community outreach work to engage unorganised workers about the issues they face and the benefits of being part of a union, as well as using the TUC's unionfinder website²⁰³ to direct workers to the most appropriate union. There was a general belief amongst ITUC delegates that such work could be important in raising awareness around unions, with a Unite representative noting that 'it plants a seed in people's head, that they must organise when they go to their next workplace'.

There was also a discussion of working with **the Organise Now! project**²⁰⁴, which is backed by ASLEF, BFAWU, Strike Map and Notes from Below and **seeks to put unorganised workers in contact with a pool of coaches to talk about organising in their workplaces.** These coaches are drawn from a wide range of TUC affiliated unions, with the majority coming from Unison, Unite and the NEU. A representative of Organise Now! noted that Trades Councils represent 'a wealth of experience, and there are some people who do have time to call people up and be a sounding board about organising'.

More specifically, delegates are interested in campaigning around hospitality in the borough, with a Unite representative on ITUC noting that:

hospitality, you know, it is a big employer in Islington, and you've only just got to go outside and up the street, loads of small restaurants, and pubs, and outlets, and some of the bigger ones, [...] and some of the coffee chains, stretching right up to the Angel.

The same representative explained that local residents 'should be proud of Upper Street [...] that history there, that musical history', but that the local community should be campaigning for jobs that they can be equally proud of because some of those 'outlets do exploit people'.

Given the significance of the hospitality sector for many people's entry into the labour market ('[m]ost people will have worked in hospitality', noted one Unite official), **such a campaign could make an important contribution to raising awareness around employment rights amongst the workforce more generally.** Moreover, another Unite official we spoke to pointed to the Scottish TUC's Better Than Zero campaign²⁰⁵, a campaign against ZHCs and other aspects of pay and conditions. Its successes centre on building recognition around employment rights, unions, and giving confidence to workers. This helped to lay the groundwork for some of the successes Unite has had in unionising hospitality workplaces north of the border. Better Than Zero was also an important influence on the development of the Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise campaign²⁰⁶.

203 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/joinunion>

204 <https://www.organisenow.org.uk/>

205 <https://www.betterthanzero.org.uk/>

206 Chacko B (2020) 'Sheffield's organising experience shows how to build the labour movement', 15th May, *Morning Star*, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/sheffields-organising-experience-shows-how-build-labour-movement>

3.8. Conclusions

In this part of the report, we have explored the opportunities for the Council to increase partnership working with unions, exploring union perspectives on work-based harms and the challenges unions face.

Firstly, we evaluated union perspectives on Islington Council's engagement with their agendas. There is much to celebrate here in terms of Council messaging, good working relations, as well as in-sourcing and procurement (some of which we pick up in [Part 4](#)). Nevertheless, there was a feeling that the Council could look further into union promotion as part of its procurement strategy, as well as supporting campaigns like Unite's Good Hospitality Charter, and exploring ways to improve education around employment rights and unions in schools.

Then we expanded on our analysis of work-based harms from [Part 2](#), exploring union perspectives on particular industries, sectors and the mechanisms that generate harm. This allowed us to go beyond the numbers to understand how pay is impacted by unfair tipping policies in restaurants and 'task and finish' contracts in hotels, and how the LLW is actually perceived in a high-cost borough like Islington. We also revealed how health and safety is influenced by working environments, including the threat of violence facing shopworkers and road conditions for couriers. We examined new forms of employment insecurity, including the use of 'umbrella contracts' in schools. And we showed how the concentration of migrant and minoritised workers in jobs with the worst terms and conditions is perceived as 'institutional discrimination'.

We then briefly reviewed some examples of union success stories in the Borough, demonstrating the vitality of the local movement. Nonetheless, barriers to unionisation remain high, and in the following section we explored these in terms of size of workplaces, high turnover, lack of union access, lack of knowledge of trade unions, member engagement, language barriers and available resources. There are clear implications here around how Islington Council could support unions, ranging from advancing a positive message around union access to educating residents.

We then detailed case studies from Unite and the IWGB where they have successfully engaged with so-called 'difficult-to-organise' workers in and around Islington. There are important lessons to be learned here in terms building links between unions and specific communities, 'on-the-ground' recruitment, offering skills and services and improving the visibility of unions. Practically speaking, we recommend the Council explores possible links with the Unite projects, and continues working with the IWGB, learning the lessons from the previous project in Finsbury Park.

Finally, in terms of ITUC, we noted what a potentially important resource it is, given the challenges identified elsewhere. However, we also noted the resource constraints ITUC faces, the need for more volunteers, and to ensure that it continues to represent the widest range of workers. We discussed the appetite amongst ITUC delegates to engage in outreach work and discussed the potential of collaborations with the TUC and Organise Now!, as well as a possible focus on the hospitality industry.

4. Part 4: What are Islington Council's Policy Levers to Promote Good Work?

Part 4 looks at the main policy levers available to Islington Council to promote Good Work.

- **Section 4.1 explores the impact of austerity for Islington Council and introduces the methodology for this part of the report.**
- **Section 4.2 examines the role of Good Work Charters**, their benefits and limitations and how they need to be accompanied by a wider movement for change.
- **Section 4.3 explores Islington Council's Progressive Procurement Strategy** as a mechanism for promoting good work, particularly focusing on the procurement of home care services.
- **Section 4.4 reviews the landscape of employment rights advice provision** in the Council and Community and Volunteer Sector, highlighting the important contribution of Citizens Advice Islington, but noting resource challenges and examining what can be learned from Newham's investment in an Employment Rights Hub.
- **Section 4.5 explores the potential to promote community engagement on employment rights**, looking at possible roles for ACL and PSHE, Council services and CVS organisations (including the Marx Memorial Library).
- **Section 4.6 investigates issues around childcare provision in the borough**, noting the current recruitment crisis linked to low pay and poor working conditions, as well as the lack of flexible working arrangements, and suggesting a Council review of the sector.
- **Section 4.7 argues that developing a Night-Time Economy strategy offers an important opportunity to promote good work** in this economically and culturally significant sector, potentially including a campaigning collaboration with Islington Trades Union Council.
- **Section 4.8 summarises the findings of Part 4 of the report.**

4.1. Introduction: Islington Coping with Austerity

In this part of this report, we explore the LA's capacity to challenge work-based harms in the borough and promote good work. This will include the kind of partnership working with unions we detailed in **Part 3**, but will extend to an analysis of policy mechanisms ranging from good work charters and procurement to advice provision, and from community engagement activities to the regulation of the night-time economy.

In doing so, we are aware that **the Council has faced financial constraints through the imposition of austerity measures over a number of years, which cumulatively have reduced its spending power by 45% since 2010, entailing savings of over £300 million**²⁰⁷. Ten years ago, a report by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) commissioned by the TUC on austerity in Islington considered that the LA had worked hard to mitigate the impact of the cuts, although it has been evident that some mainline services, non-statutory services and the voluntary sector has faced damaging cuts²⁰⁸. Austerity is shaping the employment rights agenda in many ways. **Despite these challenges, there are still a range of ways that Islington Council can intervene in the local economy**, working with trade unions and community organisations to promote unionisation and employment rights in the Borough.

4.1.1. Methodology of Analysis

The analysis in Part 4 is based on 12 interviews: 6 conducted with officers from various different Islington Council teams (including Procurement, Local Economies, Family Information Service, Schools Improvement Team, Adult and Community Learning, Islington Advice Hubs) **and 6 interviews with representatives from the Community and Volunteer Sector** (Islington Bamer Advice Alliance, Help on Your Doorstep, Citizens Advice Islington, Employment Law Advice Service, the British Alevi Federation and Marx Memorial Library).

We also spoke with a Newham Council officer responsible for their Employment Rights Hub. Beyond these interviews, **we also engaged in email and other forms of communication with a wider range of organisations** (including Islington Law Centre, City Community Legal Advice Centre, London Unemployed Strategies, and London, East and South East (LESE) Regional TUC).

Furthermore, **a thorough review of a large number of Islington Council strategy and policy documents and relevant research literature**, also informed our analysis. This combination of qualitative interviews and document analysis provided a robust foundation for understanding the landscape of employment rights and good work promotion in Islington.

4.2. Good Work Charters

An increasing number of devolved authorities have formulated **'good work' initiatives** in the last decade, ranging from the Scottish Government's Fair Work Convention (2015 onwards) to the development of a Good Employment Charter by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2017 onwards), and the adoption of the London Good Work Standards by the Mayor of London (2019 onwards). **Local authorities like Islington (and Leicester) have also promoted good work despite lacking new devolved powers.**

²⁰⁷ <https://www.islington.media/news/islington-council-announces-202425-budget-proposals-and-calls-for-fair-funding-from-government>

²⁰⁸ Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2014) *A Summary of Austerity in London and A Case Study of Islington Council*, https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/London%20Final%20Report_0.pdf

This trend towards local intervention in employment regulation is linked to the move towards deregulation or ‘light touch’ regulation at the national level²⁰⁹. It also seeks to build on the growing interest in community wealth-building approaches that aim to harness the investment power and market signals of anchor institutions such as municipal councils, hospitals and universities²¹⁰. Progressive procurement and local licensing, such as hiring female apprentices for the Holloway redevelopment, are examples of how this is being achieved²¹¹.

Employment charters recognise employers offering good work and engage and influence those who may not be. These charters build employment rights, ‘away from less adversarial contexts’²¹². However, **there are concerns with the model, in that many charters fail to clearly define ‘bad work’ or how to challenge it**²¹³. Instead, they offer multi-tiered frameworks that allow most employers to claim they provide some components of good work, diluting the distinction between good and bad-quality work²¹⁴.

In 2021, Cllr Heather, proposed a simpler framework for an Islington-focused charter of workers’ rights²¹⁵. While this potentially offers a more straightforward way of cataloguing good work, or an absence of work-based harms, some of the stipulations would need to be more precisely defined.

Many charters also fall down around the promotion of trade unions (a right of access and/or recognition), opting for language around promoting ‘voice and engagement’, without also referring to unions and collective bargaining²¹⁶. On both issues our research can make a real contribution, by clearly identifying the work-based harms that need to be tackled in order to ensure good work and by centring the role of trade unions.

Another concern is the low uptake of good work accreditation—only 117 businesses, employing a quarter of a million workers, had received accreditation under London’s Good Work Standard by 2023²¹⁷. Research indicates that those that do may have already been meeting the stipulations around good work, suggesting that new groups of workers are not in general benefitting from the initiatives²¹⁸. **Research shows employers with strong local ties are more likely to engage with these charters, while sectors like retail, hospitality, and care—where problems are most prevalent—engage the least**²¹⁹.

Despite limitations, good work charters have sparked discussions around work quality, previously absent in many areas. By including stipulations around sick pay from day one and minimum ‘living hours’, charters like the London Good Work Standards send a positive message. They also create spaces for collaborations between devolved and local authorities and unions, such as the North of Tyne supply teachers’ co-operative²²⁰ and the promotion of ethical standards in the garment industry by Leicester City Council, the Trades Union Congress, GMB and Unite²²¹.

209 Johnson M Martinez Lucio M Mustchin S Grimshaw D Cartwright J Rodriguez J Dundon T (2023) ‘City regions and decent work: Politics, pluralism and policy making in Greater Manchester’, *Environment & Planning C: Politics and Space*, Vol. 41(3), p. 507.

210 Johnson et al (2023), p. 507

211 <https://buyingsocialjustice.org.uk/>

212 Hughes C Martinez Lucio M Mustchin S & Tenquist M (2024) *Understanding whether local employment charters could support fairer employment practices: Research Briefing Note*. The University of Manchester, Work and Equalities Institute, p. 5.

213 Johnson et al (2023), p. 513.

214 Hughes et al (2024), p. 2.

215 Heather G (2021) ‘Islington Charter of Workers’ Rights’, available on request.

216 McKay and Moore (2023), p. 27, and Johnson et al (2023), p. 514.

217 McKay and Moore (2023), p. 64.

218 McKay and Moore (2023), p. 28.

219 Hughes et al (2024), p. 4.

220 <https://cles.org.uk/community-wealth-building-in-practice/community-wealth-building-places/north-of-the-tyne-supply-teachers-co-op/>

221 https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/Fixing_Leicester's_Garment_Trade_Report.pdf

While charters contribute to a movement for change, they need ‘visibility and noise’²²² to grab the public’s attention, to help raise workers’ awareness of their employment rights²²³, and to backed by visible and credible enforcement mechanisms²²⁴. These key findings orientate the discussions that follow on procurement, community engagement, investment and Council policy.

4.3. Council Procurement Policies

4.3.1. Progressive Procurement Strategy

Employment rights and unionisation can be strengthened through procurement. The Progressive Procurement Strategy (PPS)²²⁵ established by Islington allows the council to maximise its spending power to benefit residents and reduce inequality in the Borough. Half of the council’s spending is commissioned, offering potential to influence community well-being and promote in-house services, as the PPS shows:

We believe that we should seek to deliver services in-house, wherever we reasonably can. Providing services in-house gives us better control of services, more flexibility around how we want to deliver services, and better protection for those delivering our key services. Ultimately allowing us to maximise the level of wealth that is locked-in for our residents and local businesses²²⁶.

Part 3 of this report – on union perspectives – highlighted services such as cleaning, waste management, and social housing that have been brought back in house, while noting the potential to bring other services back under local ownership and control (leisure and care).

The PPS emphasises delivering social value, aiming to increase employment, access to apprenticeships and career progression, while partnering with living wage employers and addressing the climate emergency. There are two key employment rights aspects to the PPS. First, the council commitment to the **Charter Against Modern Slavery**, which means businesses with contracts with the Council will be monitored. Requirements of the Charter include highlighting to suppliers that contracted workers are free to join a trade union without discrimination for doing so. There is also an obligation for public annual reporting on the implementation of the Charter²²⁷. Second, businesses will be expected to sign up to **Unison’s End Violence at Work Charter**, which entails employers having a written violence and aggression at work policy, measures taken to reduce isolated working, monitoring of violent incidents, consultation with union safety representatives, risk assessments and clear management responsibilities, adequate training and support for staff who are victims of violence at work²²⁸. However, **the PPS currently does not reference the London Mayor’s Good Work Standard, despite Islington Council having been one of the first to achieve the benchmark for its own workforce²²⁹.**

222 McKay and Moore (2023), p. 22.

223 Hughes et al (2024), p. 6.

224 Hughes et al (2024), p. 7.

225 Islington Council (2020) *Progressive Procurement Strategy*, 2 October 2020.

226 Islington Council (2020), p. 4.

227 <https://party.coop/local/councillors/modern-slavery-charter/>

228 <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/local-government/end-violence-at-work-charter/>

229 <https://www.islington.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/adult-social-care/rewards-and-benefits>

4.3.2. Procurement Strategy for Home Care Services

Islington's strategy for procuring home care services addresses workforce issues through several commitments²³⁰. **The Council has signed up to Unison's Ethical Care Charter**, and many of their contracted providers already commit to elements such as LLW, paid travel time, offering guaranteed hours to their workforce and the allocation of regular care workers to residents where possible. The Council does not commission 15-minute care visits and seeks to ensure greater commitment to enabling guaranteed hours contracts are provided to workers. Given that all providers party to the framework agreement will be required to pay LLW, the hourly rate for providers will reflect what the Council believes to be a sustainable cost of delivering care. Finally, **Providers will be expected to contribute social value** (defined in terms of inclusive economy, community wealth building and environmental priorities), which will account for 20% of contract tender evaluations.

There has been 'good progress' on many aspects of Unison's Ethical Care Charter (adopted in 2013)²³¹:

- London Living Wage (agencies who pay at least LLW has increased from 65% (2021) to 85% (2022))
- Offer of guaranteed hours
- Paid travel time (and providing work in a dedicated locality to reduce travel time)
- Occupational sick pay (currently a gap, 67% of providers as of 2023)
- Paid training time

Whilst good progress has been made, a Scrutiny Review has recommended that Commissioners should 'explore which social value clauses and good employment practice stipulations, including for small/local providers, would be appropriate to include in future specifications and contracts'²³². On this point, we would argue there is scope for further work. While the PPS covers many aspects of 'good work' through the mechanism of the Ethical Care Charter, **there is insufficient attention to the promotion of union membership, beyond asking providers to sign an anti-blacklisting declaration**. As we saw in Part 3, there is a perspective from Unison that the Council needs to be more pro-active in promoting unions to care workers, perhaps by bringing them together in a forum where the union could speak to them.

4.4. Advice Service Provision and Challenges

Advice services in the LBI have faced growing demand due to austerity, increasing poverty, and an incredibly punitive and complex welfare system, all while dealing with cuts to enforcement agencies, changes in legal aid rules, and anti-union legislation. This section maps key agencies providing advice, particularly those focused on employment rights in the borough.

230 Islington Council (2022) *Procurement Strategy for Homecare Services*, p. 2-3.

231 Islington Council (2022) *Scrutiny review of adult paid carers*, LB Islington Meeting of: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, 13 December 2022.

232 Islington Council (2022), recommendation 4.5.

4.4.1. Islington Council

Council services provide advice and support to residents, including on topics of budgeting, finance and debt, benefits maximisation, wellbeing, housing, family, free early education and play, community safety, and work through various services:

- **Access Islington Hubs** (drop-in, support surgeries and pre-booked advice sessions - located at Upper Street, Finsbury Library and Manor Gardens)
- **Islington Council Income Maximisation Scheme (IMAX)** (advice and support in relation to benefits and tax credit claims - available via phone and email)
- **Family Information Service (FIS)** ²³³ (support around children, education and families - available via phone and email)
- **Housing Advice** (council and private sector tenants, repairs, bidding for homes - online and through referral)
- **iWork** ²³⁴ (support to out-of-work and low-paid residents to access employment advice, find jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities – available via phone and email)

In our view these services could play a contributory role in signposting residents to sources of support on employment rights and promoting trade unions. As noted in **Part 3** of the report, the Housing Advice service are already committed to working with the community union ACORN, as well as the London Renters Union²³⁵ (as part of Islington's Private Rented Housing Charter).

4.4.2. Role of the Third Sector

- **Islington Law Centre (ILC):** Offers legal advice on debt, education, benefits, housing, and immigration, though employment law advice has been limited since legal aid cuts in 2013.
- **Islington BAMER Advice Alliance (IBAA):** Provides support services through member organizations and online advice form, noting a significant increase in demand post-pandemic resulting in an 'overload' of cases.
- **Islington Legal Advice Centre (ILAC):** Offers free legal advice weekly but lacks capacity for casework.
- **City Community Legal Advice Centre (CCLAC):** Provides free legal advice on a range of issues, including employment law, but struggles to meet overwhelming demand.

²³³ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/children-and-families/contact-us>

²³⁴ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/support-finding-work>

²³⁵ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/private-sector-housing/private-rented-accommodation/private-rented-sector-charter>

4.4.3. Citizens Advice Islington (CAI) Employment Rights

CAI provides free legal advice ranging from benefits and debt, to family, housing and immigration. **CAI is the most extensive and important advice service available to residents in the borough in challenging work-based harms** and so we focus on the service in some detail in this section.

Issues relating to employment rights have long been a key concern for CAI. This was reflected in the Make it Work (MIW) initiative (2015 – 2018). Funded through the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, the MIW was responding to the increasing number of people in low paid and insecure work experiencing a wide range of employment rights abuse (some of which we discuss in **Part 2** of this report), as well as research by National CA on the role of fear (of losing jobs) in explaining workers' unwillingness to assert their rights²³⁶. An important aspect of the Islington MIW model was working across agencies, developing collaborations with iWork, Help on Your Doorstep and others²³⁷.

Client data from the MIW end of project evaluation shows the depth and breadth of support provided – in total over 8,000 issues from over 2,500 clients. The table below²³⁸ shows the breakdown of the top ten client issues. The total financial gain for MIW clients between October 2015 and October 2018 was estimated at £1,680,000²³⁹.

Table 1: Make It Work Top Ten Client Issues – October 2015-October 2018

	Issues	No of claimants
Employment	5,264	1102
Benefit and Tax	1,380	483
Discrimination	542	302
Financial services	381	279
Legal	223	141
Tax	172	103
Debt	126	71
Benefits	95	50
Housing	87	44
Other	55	52

The MIW evaluation from 2018 clearly argues for a continuation of such a service in Islington, citing an increasing number of claims being made to Employment Tribunal, the introduction of full-service UC, and 'the persistent feature of insecure employment in the modern flexible workforce'²⁴⁰. Despite this need, **funding for MIW was not sustained**. However, **in its place**, since December 2020 **CA Islington has collaborated with the RCJ Advice - Citizens Advice and Law Centre on the Employment Law Advice Service (ELAS) covering Islington and other London boroughs**. ELAS provided legal advice on employment issues, helping clients with in-work and post-termination issues, drafting grievance letters, negotiating with employers through ACAS, and offering holistic support, including basic benefits advice and referrals²⁴¹. **Figure 13** below provides an overview of ELAS casework from 2023 (acknowledging that clients will experience more than one issue)²⁴².

236 Citizens Advice (2015) *Out of Hours Balancing Flexibility and Security in Non-Traditional Employment Contracts* <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/Outofhours.pdf>

237 Citizens Advice Islington (2018) *End of project evaluation report for Make It Work at Citizens Advice Islington*, internal report. p. 6.

238 Citizens Advice Islington (2018). p. 24.

239 Citizens Advice Islington (2018). p. 15.

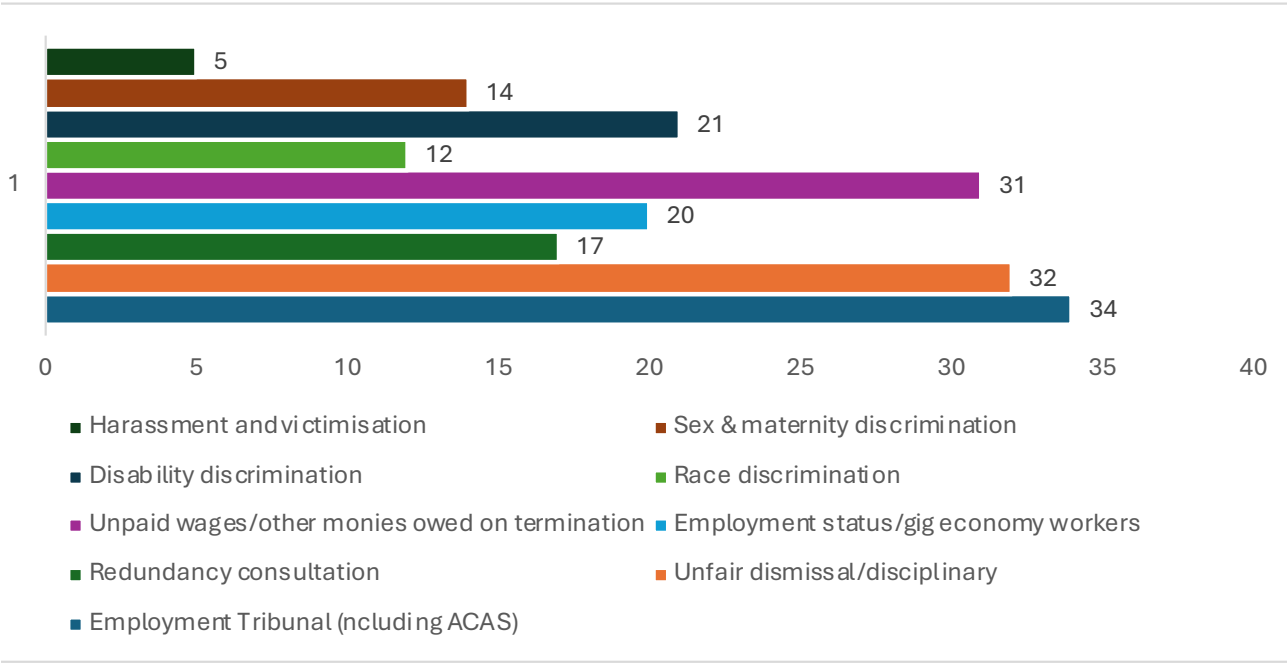
240 Citizens Advice Islington (2018), p. 26.

241 Citizens Advice Islington (2023) *Employment Legal Advice Service: Final Report to Trust for London*, internal report.

242 Citizens Advice Islington (2023), pp. 5-6.

The ELAS service, though vital, represented a substantial reduction in resources compared to MIW, which had three staff members. ELAS operated with one full time worker for the last two years, having initially had two full time staff between 2020-22. The reduction in the number of issues being addressed more recently (compare tables 1 and 2) is therefore more a reflection of reduced resource, rather than reduced demand. To combat this, ELAS worked closely with other organisations around specific campaigns such as with LawWorks’ Unpaid Wages Project. The unpaid wages project offers pro bono expertise in the specific area of employment law around unpaid wages, helping individuals in London who are subject to ‘wage thefts’²⁴³. ELAS was discontinued in November 2024 because of a lack of available funding.

Figure 13: ELAS Casework 2023 (%)



243 <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/unpaid-wages-project>



**Table 2: CA Islington Employment Rights Queries, Advice and Casework
Jan 2023 - Jan 2024**

Queries, Advice and Casework	Total number	Top 2 queries
Employment Tribunals and Appeals	132	Eligibility (41) Time limits (35)
Redundancy	83	Employer redundancy pay (17) Selection for redundancy (17)
Employment terms and conditions	63	Contract query (39) working hours and break (4)
Employment pay	128	Unlawful deductions (39) holiday (19)
Parental and carer rights	8	References (4) Right to work check (2)
Emp. discrimination	64	Disability excluding mental health (22) mental health (13)
Self-employment	14	Emp. Status (5) business start-up (3)
Apply for a job	8	References (4) right to work check (2)
Employer dismissal	134	Unfair dismissal (44) wrongful dismissal (22)
Dispute resolution	69	Disciplinary procedures (28) Grievance process (18)
Resignation	13	notice and final pay (4)
Employment access and insecurity	62	Trade union issues (12) health and safety (7)
Access to jobs	12	Training and skills (4) lack of suitable job (3)
Insecure work	4	Agency work (3)

Table 2 provides an overview of CA Islington employment rights queries from January 2023 to January 2024. The most common issues Islington residents experience include unfair dismissal, employment tribunals, and pay-related disputes, reflecting persistent job insecurity and wage theft problems. All challenges we have detailed elsewhere in this report.

4.4.4. Major Challenges Facing Employment Rights Advice Services

A 2020 GLA commissioned report on advice provision²⁴⁴ found that **even before the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing numbers of people in London were seeking advice for welfare benefits, debt, immigration and employment issues, whilst services struggled with depleted funding and staff.**

Drivers of increased demand for advice include welfare reforms, the no recourse to public funds, immigration policy, the rise of ZHCs and a minimum wage culture. ELAS in their report to Trust for London state that the service has:

experienced a high level of demand from predominantly low paid and vulnerable workers who usually have no other access to legal help. We have noticed an increase in workers cancelling their TU (Trade Union) memberships due to the cost-of-living crisis because it was seen as an unnecessary extra expense while there were no issues at work.

The fact that service is now discontinued due to lack of available funding is therefore clearly a major concern.

A Learning & Work Institute (LWI) report on employment rights support services in Newham in 2019 found that whilst the provision was of a high quality it was limited by lack of public awareness, barriers to access and insufficient capacity – challenges that in our opinion apply to Islington in 2024. Our analysis of work-based harms in **Part 2** of this report clearly shows that employment rights abuses are widespread, particularly for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups²⁴⁵.

Trade unions in the borough provide employment rights advice but primarily to their members. Unfortunately, as we have seen, union membership is lowest in sectors with low pay and insecure contracts—precisely where it's most needed.

4.4.5. The Case for Expanding Employment Rights: Lessons from Newham

The 2019 LWI report recommended establishing a comprehensive employment rights service in **Newham**, which was realised through the creation of an **Employment Rights Hub**. Sitting under the Our Newham Money service (which also provides budgeting, debt and benefits maximisation support)²⁴⁶, the Hub has been running for three years, with three specialist employment advisors and one team leader. It is seen as key to tackling insecure work and delivering the Mayor of Newham's community wealth building agenda²⁴⁷.

The Hub aims to improve working conditions in the borough through **three streams of work**:

- **One-to-one case work** – supporting residents facing employment rights issues (encompassing employment status, statutory and contractual rights, unlawful deduction of wages, sick pay, equality and discrimination, unfair dismissal, maternity and paternity rights, sexual harassment, disability and pensions)

244 <https://londoncitizensadvice.org.uk/uploads/Advising-Londoners-Report-30072020-1.pdf>

245 Crunden O and Dromey J (2019) *Employment rights service – community action research*, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute, <https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1056/employment-rights-service-final-report>

246 <https://www.newham.gov.uk/advice-support-benefits/newham-money>

247 <https://www.ier.org.uk/comments/how-newham-is-fighting-back-against-insecure-work-with-the-countrys-first-employment-rights-hub/>

- **Raising awareness of employment rights** – offering upskilling workshops on payslips, self-employment and umbrella companies, maternity rights, the menopause, and employment rights for autistic people and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- **Outreach with local businesses** – working to promote an understanding of the benefits of good work

Similar to the ELAS service, the Hub is not a legal advice service and cannot provide representation in the courts, however it does provide advice, information and support to residents in asserting their own legal rights on the range of topics identified above, as well as information around joining a union.

The Hub resolves around 90% of issues through casework, with only 10% referred for legal action—95% of which are settled before reaching an employment tribunal²⁴⁸. **In 2023, the Hub supported 160 residents, recovering £1 million in outcomes**, including unpaid wages and settlement agreements. Moreover, the Hub has increased awareness of union membership and workers' rights through its workshops.

Undoubtedly then, the Hub represents a major success as a policy initiative for Newham and its communities.

4.5. Community Engagement on Employment Rights

One aspect of the LWI report on employment rights in Newham is the focus on the **importance of capacity building as part of an employment rights strategy**. In this section we briefly map existing capacity and community engagement and consider how it will facilitate and enhance employment rights provision and union engagement/awareness.

4.5.1. Employment Support by Islington Council

The iWork service offers help anyone who is out of work in Islington to find a job, apprenticeship, training or education. This includes matching residents' skills to local job and training opportunities, coaching, and a dedicated team to support those aged 16-24. Islington has also been working with other Central London Forward (CLF) boroughs through Central London Works and the Connected Communities programmes to develop a coherent approach to supporting unemployed residents into good work.

Islington is taking up a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) grant under the People and Skills element to deliver several interventions aimed at improving life chances for Islington residents by investing in employment support and skills training. The projects will be delivered by the iWork and Youth progression services, in partnership with Adult and Community Learning (ACL)²⁴⁹.

There is scope to better integrate education around employment rights and access to trade unions into these different forms of employment support.

248 Discussions between the authors and Newham Borough Council.

249 Islington Council (2024) 'UKSPF-Employment Skills, Report of Corporate Director of Community Wealth Building', 30 April, <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/documents/s36707/UKSPF%20Employment%20and%20Skills.pdf>

4.5.2. Adult and Community Learning

Islington ACL is the dedicated adult learning service delivered inhouse by the Council. Funded through Greater London Authority (GLA) core funding with some additional project funding, the service offers free tertiary education and health and well-being courses for Islington residents over the age of nineteen. Delivered in libraries; children's centres; community centres and other locations across the borough²⁵⁰, courses cover topics like 'Introduction to Working in Administration', which includes a unit on 'policies and procedures in the workplace'. That unit helps to educate learners that as well as responsibilities to their employer they also have employment rights. ACL tutors report that learners feel empowered when looking at a particular issue that speaks to their experience (ranging from flexible working requests to disclosure of a disability). Such examples are a strong foundation that can be expanded upon, and ACL have also expressed an interest in promoting awareness of trade unions as part of their day-to-day work.

4.5.3. Education on Employment Rights through Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)

While an 'employability agenda' has become increasingly prominent in both **compulsory and tertiary education** over the last decade, this is frequently conceptualised purely in terms of raising aspirations and the marketability of individuals²⁵¹ (in terms of developing skills for employability, drafting curriculum vitae, and preparing for interviews). **Very little emphasis, if any, is given to education around employment rights**. This is a crucial omission, both because of the scale of employment rights abuses and associated work-based harms that we have detailed in **Part 2**, but also because it is known that younger workers have a poorer awareness of their employment rights²⁵² and feel that employers take advantage of their limited experience²⁵³. This was also highlighted by union representatives in **Part 3**.

In our discussions with PSHE educators in the borough it has been identified that there is a lack of curriculum time (given the number of different life skills that tend to be attached to PSHE) and a lack of specialist PSHE teachers, meaning there are challenges around developing and accessing appropriate materials. Consequently, **issues around employment rights 'tend to be sidelined'**²⁵⁴ relative to other topics (such as Relationships and Sex Education) where there are good quality materials produced by national and local bodies that can be rolled out by teachers. That said, there have been sporadic efforts to look at employment rights and trade unions in relation to (for example) sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement.

There is potential for Islington's School Improvement Team to address this gap through tailored employment rights resources, such as those provided by the *Unite in Schools* programme, focusing on issues relevant to young people in Islington (workplace sexual harassment, unpaid wages, precarious contracts, racism in the workplace)²⁵⁵. In order to roll this out effectively, our discussions centred on the need for a survey of PSHE educators in the borough to assess precisely the extent to which employment rights are being covered in schools, and then to use this to inform the development, trialling and evaluation of resources (structured lessons) on employment rights issues, which could then be disseminated across all schools.

250 Islington Council (2024) *Adult Community Learning Service Self-Assessment Report (SAR) 2022/23*, <https://adultlearning.islington.gov.uk/?page=policies>

251 Atkins L (2013) 'From Marginal Learning to Marginal Employment? The Real Impact of "Learning" Employability Skills', *Power and Education*, vol. 5(3): 28-37.

252 Meager N Tyers C Perryman S Rick J and Willison R (2002) *Awareness, knowledge and exercise of individual employment rights*, London: Department of Trade and Industry, p. 32.

253 Orlando C (2022) *Good Quality Work: Youth Voices From Across the UK*, London: The Health Foundation and the Institute for Employment Studies, p. 12.

254 Discussions with PSHE Islington Education Schools Improvement Team.

255 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/why-join/membership-types/community-membership/unite-in-schools>

4.5.4. Community and Volunteer Sector

In this following section we map out third sector organisations, which in addition to those outlined in section 4.2, have a role to play in community education around employment rights and trade unions. However, **further capacity mapping** (beyond the outline here and above) **and training for CVS organisations is likely to be needed to strengthen their ability to support their service users on issues relating to employment rights.**

Islington Bamer Advice Alliance (IBBA)

IBAA provided advice and support to 5,286 residents in 2022/23²⁵⁶ (an increase of 152% from the previous year) underlining the importance of advice services as part of advocacy. However, there remain challenges around capacity (see above). An interview with the leaders of the IBAA²⁵⁷ has opened up **potential for meaningful engagement around trade unions to provide voice for Islington's diverse communities.**

Local Wellbeing Networks (LWN)

As part of Islington Council's 'Fairer Together' initiative, Voluntary Action Islington and Octopus Community Networks have established LWN throughout the borough. The intention is to increase collaboration between service providers and to provide a platform for communities to articulate their needs. The networks consist of statutory service providers, charities, community groups and residents, who are all committed to taking a more active role in their local community, sharing best practices and collaborating for positive social change. **This could be an ideal forum for engaging with on the findings of this research and building a coalition to promote good work.**

Cripplegate Foundation

Cripplegate Foundation is an independent grant-giving trust which works mainly in Islington, spending over £1.7 m a year on grants that meet the Foundation's priorities of addressing inequality in Islington²⁵⁸. **There is a potential here to include Cripplegate as a key partner in developing an employment rights service.**

Islington People's Rights (IPR)

IPR delivers independent welfare benefits and debt advice services in Islington. Their activities are designed to support residents living in poverty and they are committed to addressing inequality in Islington and beyond. IPR's Core Service is funded by Islington Council, providing specialist welfare benefits and debt advice for 3,000 local residents annually. This includes a telephone advice line that received 6,275 calls over the course of 2022-23. **Where specific support is needed an IPR Specialist Caseworker is allocated to assist with maximising incomes from benefits entitlements and managing complex debt issues**²⁵⁹. There is potential for IPR to make referrals to an expanded employment rights offer from Islington Council.

256 IBAA (2023) *Fighting poverty, inequality and social injustice*: IBAA Report of Trustees and Annual Accounts 2022/23, London: IBAA.

257 <https://ibaa.org.uk/>

258 <https://cripplegate.org/>

259 Islington People's Rights (2023) *Impact Report 2022-23*, <https://www.ipradvice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IPR-IR-22-23-Medium-Res.pdf>

Help on Your Doorstep

Help on Your Doorstep (HYOD) aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Islington, particularly the vulnerable and isolated. They do this through direct engagement with local people, providing information, advice and guidance and working in partnership with up to 150 service providers who offer specialist forms of support. **A real virtue of the organisation is their door knocking outreach exercises in housing estates, taking support services directly to residents.** They offer support on a range of issues from disability services to benefits maximisation, energy bills to translation services. Most recently, they have been making referrals to the community union ACORN for those facing housing issues.

A spokesperson we interviewed provided us with examples of the employment issues that are reported to them, including bullying and a failure to provide flexible working for those with caring commitments in the hospitality sector, and unpaid travel time for care workers. However, there are limited forms of support that HYOD can signpost residents to, given the stretched resources and capacity at CA Islington (and the City University pro bono Law Clinic). Nevertheless, **if advice services in Islington were better resourced, HYOD would be an ideal mechanism for making referrals.**

4.5.5. Marx Memorial Library

We do not intend to repeat findings on the experiences and perspectives of trade unions and the Islington Trades Council featured in Part 3 of this report, none the less they inform a number of concrete proposals, which we will return to in the recommendations section at the end of this report. It is however worth giving a special mention to the **Marx Memorial Library and Worker's School**, and the role it has to play in education around employment rights and trade unions.

MML, founded in 1933, still serves today as a resource on education around Marxism, the history of socialism and working-class movements. The library actively engages the public and unions, hosting meetings and training events for several national trade unions – including BFAWU and the RMT - and collaborating with organisations like the *Peel Institute* and *Finsbury Estate* on projects that explore historical and contemporary workers' rights. For this in particular, local residents participated in a series of workshops, immersing themselves in the history of the area, and connecting historical themes around workers' rights, women's liberation, protest, and democracy, to their contemporary experiences.

The library engaged with over 3000 users in 2023, a significant increase on 2022 and offers the potential of a direct link between trade unions and the community. **Discussions with MML have identified substantial potential given that they already engage with primary and secondary schools in the borough.** For example, a recent event for Refugee Week on Basque child refugees in the Spanish Civil War. **There is scope to expand this work further, potentially tying into the PSHE education** (discussed above) **around employment rights.**

4.6. Childcare Provision

The lack of flexible working and reasonable workplace adjustments to allow for caring responsibilities (reflecting discriminatory practices) can be viewed as a work-based harm. In this respect women, who disproportionately bear these responsibilities, are especially impacted. The current 'childcare crisis' is a symptom of austerity combined with poor-quality work and weak employment rights.

Evidence obtained from the Family Information Service²⁶⁰ revealed that underfunding and the high cost of childcare in Islington is contributing to serious problems of sustainability, especially in relation to private providers. Private sector childcare is notorious for low paid, poor working conditions and non-unionised employment²⁶¹. **This sector overwhelmingly employs women.**

Although Islington Council childcare provision involves unionised staff and better terms and conditions than private providers, nevertheless, recruitment and retention is an issue due to low pay. Discussions with officers at the Council revealed there to be 21.5 full-time equivalent posts vacant as of 2023, many of which have been unfilled for over two years despite several rounds of recruitment. Recruitment to childcare roles have had the least success out of all posts advertised on the Council website as the national crisis in early years staffing continues. **Feedback from staff point to low pay, limited pay progression, low status and an increasing workload as reasons for leaving the profession**, often turning to service industries where they can earn more, with fewer responsibilities.

The study of barriers to employment for BAME²⁶² people in the borough highlighted that none of the women in their focus groups expressed an interest in childcare as a work option. Though almost all had children and the need to find work within school hours was a major barrier to progressing into employment²⁶³. Instead, they focused their job search on low skilled and low paid work in social care, providing school meals and teaching assistant posts. We have already noted Unison concerns around the quality of the latter roles in **Part 3** of this report.

4.6.1. Single parents

Recent studies by Gingerbread highlight the precarious position of lone parents, 90% of whom are women in Islington²⁶⁴. These parents are particularly vulnerable to work-based harms due to the intersecting challenges of the welfare system and inflexible employment practices. As Gingerbread notes, particularly in London, single parents face issues related to commuting, employer support, and the availability of local, flexible jobs, all of which exacerbate their sense of insecurity.

260 Interview with Islington Family Information Service and follow up work by Jimmy Flynn
See also Islington Council (2023) *Childcare Sufficiency Assessment*.

261 Social Mobility Commission (2020) *The stability of the early years workforce in England*, London.

262 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Our preferred term is 'minoritised ethnicities' as this draws attention to the process of being minoritised (i.e. there is no 'natural' basis to race and racialisation). However, we use this term in its original context, recognising that term is commonly used in policy contexts.

263 Lewis et al (2022) *Islington Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Employment Research Project*, Islington Council and London Metropolitan University <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/IslingtonBAMEEmploymentFinalReport1%20%282%29.pdf>

264 Gingerbread (2023) *The Single Parent Employment Challenge-Job loss and jobseeking after the pandemic*, London Gingerbread, <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Single-Parent-Employment-Challenge-Report-SPEC.pdf>
Gingerbread (2022) *The Invisible Family: the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on Single Parents in London*, London Gingerbread <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Report-The-Invisible-Family.pdf>, Islington Council (2023) *State of Equalities in Islington*, London Islington

In Islington, lone parents face similar struggles, according to information obtained from providers in Islington:

there is a lot of talk about flexible working, but most employers are not very sympathetic to offer this to parents, jobs are being advertised as flexible hours but people are required to work on weekends at times (in retail and care). This puts limitations on the work choices a parent can make (most parents aim to work in schools to avoid this) and in turn, discourage parents from looking for employment.²⁶⁵

The availability and cost of childcare is a central concern for lone parents. Service providers also report that as well as the unavailability of spaces, many lone parents lack understanding of the various support systems available to them. Given that single parents are overwhelmingly women and are largely managing on one income, they are being disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Poverty is significantly higher among single parent households.

Pre- pandemic, just 15 percent of single parents in London reported having access to flexible working arrangements²⁶⁶. This statistic underscores the experience that many single parents face, as flexible working is difficult to raise in initial interviews with employers and difficult to arrange once working. **Surveys by Timewise confirm that as of 2021, just 26% of job adverts included flexible working options,** further limiting employment opportunities for single parents²⁶⁷.

4.6.2. Interventions

While the evidence reviewed above strongly suggests there are problems around flexible working, especially in relation to caring commitments and affecting certain demographics more than others, **there is a lack of local data for Islington.** We would therefore **recommend that the LA undertakes survey research on the issue and explores ways of promoting best practice with local employers.**

Moreover, there is a need to address low pay and poor working conditions in the childcare sector. Whilst Islington has the ability to influence pay and terms at its own directly managed nurseries, there is a need for unions to increase campaigning and unionisation efforts in this area. Barriers to unionisation in childcare is not a problem we have directly considered in this report, but could be the focus of follow up work. In any case, there is scope for the **Council to undertake a comprehensive review of the costs, funding and staffing of childcare in the borough and to engage with unions and other stakeholders on promoting good work in the sector.**

²⁶⁵ Comments from a service provider.

²⁶⁶ Gingerbread (2022) *The Invisible Family: The impact of the pandemic on single parents in London*, Gingerbread, p

²⁶⁷ Gingerbread (2023) *The Single Parent Employment Challenge-Job loss and jobseeking after the pandemic*, London Gingerbread, <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Single-Parent-Employment-Challenge-Report-SPEC.pdf>

4.7. Promoting Good Work in the Night-Time Economy

4.7.1. Formulating a Local Strategy

In 2021, the Mayor of London/GLA encouraged all boroughs to formulate a Night-Time Economy Strategy²⁶⁸. This presents Islington an opportunity to shape its NTE in ways that promote good work. As of 2017, Islington had an estimated 4,810 NTE businesses employing some 59,500 workers, placing it in the top ten of London boroughs²⁶⁹.

The Mayor's 2021 guidance document lists a number of suggested actions that boroughs could consider, ranging from engagement with residents and businesses, to record-keeping and land-use planning, to improving access to public space and providing amenities. Of particular relevance here is Action Point 13 'night workers', which calls on strategies to engage with night workers and employers to come up with projects that improve their wellbeing²⁷⁰, including the promotion of the Mayor's Good Work Standard.

Islington Council has previously considered NTE issues, and a 2012 report focused on crime, anti-social behaviour and community safety, centring on the two perceived 'hot spots' of Angel and Finsbury Park²⁷¹. Recommendations focused on alcohol policy, licensing and landlords' responsibilities. The report did however also call for the encouragement of local residents to be employed in the NTE.

More recently there are three local strategies that should have relevance to the governance of the NTE. Firstly, **Islington's Community Wealth Building Strategy**²⁷² calls for 'unlocking the potential of our local high streets, [...] creating vibrant, welcoming, safe and inclusive places for residents and visitors'. It also calls for boosting prosperity through 'championing social inclusion' in the borough's growth sectors. And finally, promoting independents through helping to 'grow Islington's small and micro business community'.

Secondly, the **Imagine Islington Cultural Strategy**²⁷³ draws attention to support for the NTE through the Licensing and Local Economies teams who work to 'to support local businesses to thrive, as well as be compliant and well-regulated, run safely and inclusively'.

Thirdly, the Borough's **Violence Reduction Strategy**²⁷⁴ notes that the NTE is 'a fundamental part of our community in Islington', although it can be associated with issues of drug and alcohol-fuelled violence, sexual harassment and assaults. This is the rationale for the use of the late-night levy and other policies designed to 'ensure everyone can enjoy a safe night out'.

In 2019 Islington signed up to **Mayor's Women's Night Safety Charter** and appointed Cllr Una O'Halloran, Executive Member with responsibility for Licensing, as a champion within the organisation to actively promote women's night safety. The Women's Night Safety Charter seeks to help boost safety for women regardless of whether they are workers, patrons, or simply travelling around the borough at night²⁷⁵.

268 <https://publica.co.uk/news-greater-london-authority-launches-ambitious-night-time-strategy-guidance/>

269 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/london-night-time-economy/>

270 Greater London Authority (2020a) Developing a night time strategy – Part 1: Guidance on Process, London: GLA, p. 9.

271 Islington Council (2012) *Night Time Economy Crime and Anti Social Behaviour and Alcohol Misuse*, Report of the Overview Committee.

272 L Islington Council (2023) *Community Wealth Building Strategy - Holding our Own: A new economy approach*, <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/documents/s35065/19122023%20-%20Community%20Wealth%20Building%20Strategy%20-%20v5.3.pdf>

273 L B Islington Imagine Islington Cultural Strategy 2024-2030,

274 L B Islington (2022) Islington Together: Violence Reduction Strategy 2022-2027, <https://www.islington.gov.uk/~media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/communitysafetyandemergencies/information/adviceandinformation/20212022/23832violencereductionstrategyv3-1.pdf>

275 <https://www.islington.media/news/night-czar-amy-lame-supports-councils-call-on-night-time-businesses-to-help-make-borough-safer-for-women-at-night>

4.7.2. Tackling Work-Based Harms, Promoting Good Work

The policies outlined above intersect with this report's goals in various ways. Firstly, **given that hospitality and retail are both expanding in the borough** (as we saw in **Part 2**), there is a need to ensure that this growth is inclusive. Secondly, the role of licensing is addressed in both the Cultural and Violence Reduction strategies. While this is conceived mostly in terms of policing – understandable given concerns around alcohol-fuelled violence, and violence against shop workers and night workers – **there is scope to explore how the late night levy can be used to promote good work**. In Part 3 we discussed Unite's concerns around safe transport options home for night-workers, and their *Get Me Home Safely* campaign asks local authorities to consider making this a licensing requirement²⁷⁶. This is a policy that has been adopted in international contexts, for example, Bogotá's 'Safe Seal' scheme²⁷⁷.

More generally, given our discussion of **sexual harassment** (in Parts 2 and 3), there is clearly a need to address this issue as a form of disproportionately gendered violence against women workers and patrons in the night-time economy. This would need to include **challenging recruitment practices, job policies and forms of contractual insecurity that facilitate sexual harassment**²⁷⁸.

Other work-based harms have been identified by **London's Nighttime Czar**, linked to the impacts of night work and shift work on wellbeing, with there being a need to improve job quality, wage rates and access to training and support²⁷⁹. The Mayor's strategy guidance meanwhile also makes reference to access to flexible childcare and transport²⁸⁰. In terms of the former, case studies examined by the GLA included **a 24-hour nursery in Croydon as potential solution for parents working night-shifts**²⁸¹.

Trade unions could play a key role in improving conditions in the NTE, which is so crucial to the Islington economy and its cultural landscape. As discussed in Part 3, **Unite's Fair Hospitality Charter, could be advanced as a minimum benchmark for employers**. Unite's successful recognition campaign with the **Dalston Superstore**, leading to agreements on shift work, worker's health and safety, safe travel and wages at the LLW, **serves as a model**.

Additionally, a variety of unions, such as **RMT (transport), Usdaw and GMB (retail), and BECTU-Prospect (leisure), have an interest in supporting night workers**. Moreover, as we described in Part 3, there is clearly an **appetite from ITUC to engage in campaigning work around hospitality**, utilising volunteers to engage in organising work, and building links with communities to raise the profile of good work.

276 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/get-me-home-safely-campaign/get-me-home-safely-take-action-on-liquor-licences>

277 Greater London Authority (2020b) *Developing a night time strategy* – Part 2: Guidance, precedents and case studies, London: GLA, p. 99.

278 Jeffery B Beresford R Thomas P Etherington D & Jones M (2024) *Challenging Sexual Harassment in Low Paid and Precarious Hospitality Work*, Sheffield: Zero Hours Justice, <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/33597/>

279 London Night Time Commission (2022) *Think Night London's Neighbourhoods From 6pm to 6am*, London Night Time Commission, p66. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ntc_report_online.pdf

see also London Assembly Economy Committee Night Vision: Rebuilding London's Night Time Economy, 2021

280 GLA (2020a), pp. 14, 35.

281 GLA (2020b), p. 102.

4.8. Conclusions

In this part of the report, we have explored potential policy levers available to Islington Council to promote good work, even in the context of significant challenges relating to austerity and budget cuts.

In section 4.2, we explored the role of good work charters, acknowledging that these can be useful tools for recognising employers who are offering good work and engaging with those who may not be. Nevertheless, such charters also need to be underpinned by an understanding of what ‘bad work’ looks like, which is where our analysis of work-based harms can be useful. There are also concerns that such charters can be so variegated as to be unwieldy, and – most fundamentally – will lack meaning if they are not backed up by enforcement and a wider movement for change. This latter point is important for our subsequent discussion of how a wide range of unions, council services and third sector organisations can feed into such a movement.

Section 4.3 focused on LA procurement. Here we considered Islington’s community wealth building strategy, looking at the definition of social value and the scope to include the London Mayor’s Good Work Standard (or equivalent) within the procurement process. We also explored progress on the procurement strategy for homecare more specifically, and the need to do more around promoting union access to care workers.

In section 4.4, we mapped out the landscape of advice provision in the borough, with a particular focus on those offering guidance on employment rights issues, or those with the potential to do so, as well as some of the issues relating to resources and capacity. Here we noted the paucity of support available, linked to some service providers dropping out of employment rights advice provision due to cuts to legal aid, or simply struggling with very high caseloads. This led on to a discussion of ELAS, delivered by CAI and the RCJ Advice - Citizens Advice and Law Centre. Although this service – and its predecessors – did provide the mainstay of employment rights advice in the borough for many years, it was under-resourced and its funding has not been sustained. There is therefore a need for investment in this area, on the model of Newham Employment Rights Hub.

In section 4.5 our analysis centred on mapping actual and potential capacity to promote community engagement on employment rights. We reviewed a number of services provided by Islington Council relating to employment and suggested there is scope to better integrate education around and promotion of employment rights and unionisation into council service provision. More specifically, we looked at the kind of work being undertaken by ACL, which could be expanded upon and linked to the promotion of union membership. We also looked at the opportunity to assess the scale of employment rights education as part of the PSHE curriculum, and to develop, trial and evaluate resources that could be produced to assist PSHE educators. We also looked at third sector and labour movement organisations that also have a role to play in the promotion of good work.

In section 4.6, we explored issues around childcare provision, noting the recruitment crisis linked to low pay, poor working conditions and non-unionised employment. We noted that this disproportionately impacted upon (often multiply marginalised) lone parents, who were unable to access flexible working arrangements. There is a need to more adequately map issues around flexible working and for the council to undertake a comprehensive review of costs, funding and staffing, in consultation with unions and other stakeholders.

Finally, in section 4.7 we looked at the possibility of developing a Night-Time Economy strategy as an opportunity to promote good work in this growing sector. Here we noted the scope to use licensing to promote good work, as well as the need to challenge sexual harassment and to support a potential ITUC campaign centred on the borough’s nationally significant night-time economy.

5. Part 5: Report Overview and Conclusions

Part 5 provides an overview of the report and lists our key recommendations.

- **Section 5.1 provides a summary of the key findings of the report.**
- **Section 5.2 lists our recommendations**, which are aimed at Islington Council, trade unions and union organisations (including Islington Trades Union Council and the national Trades Union Congress), the local Community and Volunteer Sector and research communities.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This project emerged out of a series of roundtable discussion convened by CAPE and Islington Council, which identified the role of declining union membership as a factor in production of work-based harms in the borough. In **Part 1** of the report, we explored this background, providing a definition of ‘work-based harms’, reviewing national evidence and debates on declining union membership and introducing the concept of ‘community unionism’.

In **Part 2** we explained the data limitations and the lack of reliable evidence for some of the work-based harms we are considering, as well as setting out the Islington context, both in terms of occupational profile of local residents and the local labour market. Notwithstanding the issues around data, we were then able to provide a reasonably comprehensive profile of the distribution of work-based harms in the borough, showing that a significant minority of both Islington residents and workers experience one or more work-based harms, that these harms are concentrated in particular sectors, and that particular demographics (especially women and minoritised ethnicities) are most at risk.

In **Part 3** we explored how the council partners with unions to promote good work, firstly exploring the Council’s strong track record on supporting unions, but also examining areas where unions believe the Council could play more of a role. We then expanded on our analysis of work-based harms from **Part 2**, exploring union perspectives on particular industries, sectors and the mechanisms that generate harm (such as unfair tipping policies, exposure to violence in the workplace, ‘umbrella contracts’ and institutional discrimination). We briefly reviewed examples of union successes in borough, but also analysed the barriers to unionisation in some detail and provided case studies of unions engaging with so-called ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers. Finally, we reviewed the potential contribution of ITUC to union revitalisation. A number of recommendations emerge from this analysis, ranging from the Council promoting union membership through education and advice services, to making linkages with ongoing union projects in the borough and providing continued funding to migrant worker organising. We also made recommendations to ITUC, working in partnership with the national TUC to support unions.

In **Part 4**, we turned out attention more centrally to the policy levers available to the Council to support unions and promote good work. We examined the role of Good Work Charters in defining and promoting good work, while noting their limitations. We reviewed the Council's Progressive Procurement Strategy and progress implementing Unison's Ethical Care Charter. Then turning our attention to the landscape of employment advice provision in the borough. While highlighting excellent work by CAI and the ELAS service in particular, we noted that the service was under-resourced and that funding has not been sustained, and provided the example of Newham Employment Rights Hub as a model for investing in this kind of provision. Linked to this we looked at the potential for wider community engagement around employment rights, including possible roles for ACL and PSHE, as well as better coordination with a range of CVS organisations. Finally, we explored the need for policy and practical interventions in the childcare sector and the night-time economy, including the potential for working with trade unions and union bodies.

This scoping review informs the following recommendations aimed at the Council, trade unions and union organisations (including ITUC and the Trades Union Congress), CVS organisations and the research community:

5.2. Recommendations

Actor(s)	Recommendation	Rationale	Timeline, Resourcing & Implementation
Islington Council	1. Promote TUC 'join a union' & Organise Now! via council channels	Council already promotes ACORN to private renters	- 6 months - Staff time to liaise with TUC & Organise Now! & update webpages
	2. Develop a community unionism campaign to promote employment rights	Need to better promote unions in the borough	- 12-24 months - Establish a working group with TUC, ITUC, unions & 3rd sector to develop materials - Officer support
	3. Improve education around employment rights	Lack of public understanding of employment rights & unions	- 12-months - Staff time to develop materials (ACL, PSHE)
	4. Advocating for the cross-cutting nature of the promotion of good work	Entails local policy on poverty, inequality, regeneration, planning, families and more	- Ongoing - Integrating the work of Council departments (from family information team to procurement)
	5. Continue to build on the Progressive Procurement Strategy, making reference to a definition of 'good work'	There is a need to define high quality work via the GLA Good Work Standard or similar	- 12-24 months - Council to agree definition to be inserted into procurement process



Actor(s)	Recommendation	Rationale	Timeline, Resourcing & Implementation
Islington Council	6. Advocate for investment in employment rights advice provision	Services are overstretched & demand is unmet	- 12-24 months - approx. £200k
	7. Promote good work in the Night-Time Economy through Pathfinder Projects	Significance of local NTE & high levels of work-based harms	- 12 months - Staff time for policy development & liaison with relevant unions
	8. Develop a project to target vulnerable workers in association with IWGB	Blackstock Rd Project benefitted vulnerable workers	- 12 months - Approx £40k
	9. Work with unions to promote good work in the childcare sector	Need to improve recruitment & retention	- 12-24 months - Coordinate with unions (Unison, NEU, UVW)
	10. Scale up promotion of good work through CLF & GLA	Need to work across boroughs (high levels of commuting)	- 12-24 months
Unions	11. Draw on best practice for engaging with so-called 'difficult to-organise' workers	Need to improve rates of unionisation	- Ongoing - Investment in organisers & campaigning
	12. Regional unions to encourage branches to affiliate to ITUC	Strengthens networks & resources	- 0-24 months - National TUC work with union Regional Offices
	13. National TUC to develop capacity in local Trades Union Councils & refresh 'join a union' initiative	A need to think strategically on improving capacity in Trades Councils	- 12-24 months - National TUC to consult with unions & Trades Councils
	14. Islington TUC to work with the national TUC & Organise Now! to promote unions to unorganised workers	Unionfinder & Organise Now! tools can improve the efficiency of outreach work	- 0-24 months - ITUC to liaise with national TUC & Organise Now! - design of relevant materials & volunteer coordination
	15. Increase the profile of ITUC through a borough-wide campaign	Unionisation & increases ITUC capacity	- 0-24 months - Work with relevant sectoral unions
	16. Unions to improve internal training on welfare reform	Union members are increasingly subject to conditionality	- 0-24 months - Liaise with national Unite Community (Brett Sparks)



Actor(s)	Recommendation	Rationale	Timeline, Resourcing & Implementation
Community & Volunteer Sector	17. Promoting collaborative design in advice provision	Need to improve coordination between different advice service providers	- 0-24 months - Voluntary Action Islington to liaise with members
	18. Develop training materials for CVS sector	Improve/standardise information on employment rights	- 0-12 months - CVS organisations to liaise with Council and unions
	19. Marx Memorial Library continue to promote education on employment rights	Maximise potential of this nationally significant resource	- 0-24 months - Islington Council to facilitate greater links between schools, community & MML
Research	20. Local surveys on the distribution of work-based harms	Variable quality of existing datasets affects the reliability of local estimates	- 0-24 months - Explore the potential use of the MOPAC survey to explore work-based harms
	21. Local survey on the availability of flexible working in the borough	Lack of local data on the issue	- 12-24 months
	22. Replicate this research on a wider spatial scale	Due to high levels of cross-border commuting	- 0-24 months - Research collaborations via CLF
	23. Further explore the potential for a community unionism campaign	Understand issues of capacity & priorities for partners	- 0-24 months - Engaging with unions, 3rd sector, anchor institutions & businesses

6. Appendices

6.1. Methodological Note

In Part 2 of this report, we made reference to the limitations of existing quantitative data at the level of local geographies, and have emphasised this issue – where appropriate – throughout the report. It is our view that such challenges should not prevent us from attempting to understand the distribution of work-based harms, but some estimates have lower confidence than others. Therefore, in this methodological note we want to provide further detail on how we have made subjective judgements as to the reliability of each estimate in relation to our labour market overview and the seven harms that are the focus of this research.

The Islington Context

In section 2.2 we outlined the Islington population, age profile and ethnic breakdown of Islington based on census figures²⁸², which are considered to be highly reliable. We then presented the occupational profile of residents based on Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey. The LFS/APS is a large-scale survey with a sample size of 147,423 cases for 2023/24 and which aims for a subsample of 450 in each Greater London Borough²⁸³, although sub-samples at the lower spatial scale may still be unrepresentative. Nonetheless, we present trend data over the period 2004 to 2021, which makes the pattern of change clear (increasing dominance of professional and managerial occupations).

We then turn to the jobs that are based in Islington, as opposed to the work profile of Islington residents, using the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), which provides estimates of the geographical and sectoral distribution of employment based on a sample of 85,000 businesses registered for VAT and/or Pay As You Earn (PAYE)²⁸⁴. Moreover, to illustrate sectoral change we have compared aggregated data for the periods 2015/17 and 2020/2022 to smooth out sampling variation.

National Minimum Wage Violations, Unpaid Wages and Low Pay

In section 2.3 we firstly estimated of the number of residents and workers paid at the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in Islington, and this estimate is considered ‘good’, being based on analysis of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2023 by the Low Pay Commission (LPC)²⁸⁵. ASHE is based on a 1% sample of employee jobs taken from HM Revenue and Customs’ (HMRC’s) PAYE records, constituting approximately 300,000 records. In the case of residents, we were able to confirm the rate for Islington was consistent with earlier analyses from 2019²⁸⁶.

Secondly, data on illegal underpayment of the National Minimum Wage were not available at lower levels of geography. We therefore extrapolated from national figures. On the basis of their analysis of ASHE, LPC estimates that 365,000 workers or 23.4% of those eligible for the NMW were underpaid in the year to 2023²⁸⁷. Applying that latter figure produces the estimate of around 1,000 workers and residents in Islington who will have faced this issue. However, this takes no account of the particularities of Islington’s local labour market and hence there is a ‘low confidence’ attached to these estimates.

282 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000019/>

283 <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=9307>

284 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/businessregisterandemploymentsurvey>

285 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-pay-commission-report-2023>

286 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-minimum-wage-coverage-by-home-location>

287 Low Pay Commission (2024) *National Minimum Wage: Low Pay Commission Report 2023*, London: LPC, p. 142.



Thirdly, for low pay for residents in Islington and workers in particular industries across London we used data aggregated from two rounds of the LFS/APS (2018 and 2021), which featured items on ‘job quality’. In addition to the problem of small sub-samples the job quality estimates are experimental and have only been made publicly available for 2018²⁸⁸ and 2021²⁸⁹. Even taking the average of these two years - as we have done – will only slightly improve the reliability of the estimates. We also have to contend with the impacts on the quality of national statistics due to collection and capacity issues during the Covid-19 pandemic²⁹⁰, as well as obvious labour market fluctuations caused by the pandemic. For these reasons the reliability of these estimates we consider no more than ‘fair’. Finally, when we examined low pay by sector, the only data available is on a London-wide basis. While obviously this will be more accurate than using national data, it fails to account for the wide diversity in experiences by sector across Greater London.

Lack of Statutory Entitlements

In section 2.4 we firstly estimate the numbers of people receiving no paid holiday entitlement based on figures taken from the Resolution Foundation, generated from their analysis of the 2022 Labour Force Survey²⁹¹. That analysis suggests 900,000 people or 3% of eligible workers nationally receive no holiday pay. We applied this figure to Islington’s resident population of employees (126,900 as of December 2023) to produce an estimate of just under 4,000 affected workers in Islington. Such an extrapolation fails to account for the particularities of Islington’s local labour market and is therefore ‘low confidence’.

The same process was followed for an estimate of just over 6,000 workers who were ill but unable to access any form of sick pay over a 12-month period. Here we extrapolated from a government survey in April 2021 conducted by Ipsos MORI using a national probability sample of 4,435 residents aged over 16²⁹². Again, this is ‘low confidence’.

Health and Safety

In section 2.5 we firstly drew on RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 2013) data²⁹³ to explore levels of reportable not-fatal injuries at different levels of geography and across different sectors. While reporting of RIDDOR classifiable incidents²⁹⁴ is a legal duty on employers, the HSE estimates that up to 50% of workplace injuries go unreported²⁹⁵, and there is anecdotal evidence, including from Islington Council in this report, that smaller firms are less likely record incidents. That said, there is no definitive evidence that reporting is skewed by geography and therefore we would deem the reliability of these statistics to be ‘good’.

288 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/jobqualityindicatorstheukhourspayandcontracts/2018>

289 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/jobqualityindicatorstheukhourspayandcontracts/2021>

290 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/updatetocoronavirusimpactonlabourmarketoutputs>

291 Judge L and Slaughter H (2023) *Enforce for good: Effectively enforcing labour market rights in the 2020s and beyond*, London: Resolution Foundation, p. 17.

292 Jacobs G McHugh S Shaw A and Anand T (2023) *Employee research phase 2: Sickness absence and return to work*, DWP research report no. 1022, p. 5.

293 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/index.htm#riddor>

294 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/key-definitions.htm>

295 <https://resources.unitetheunion.org/media/1155/1155.pdf>

Secondly, we drew on LFS/APS data collated by the HSE²⁹⁶ in respect to ‘self-reported stress, depression and anxiety’ linked to work at a regional level. Given the large sample size of the LFS/APS and the regional level of aggregation we also consider these estimates to be ‘good’. While there are concerns that the LFS has become less reliable in recent years (primarily due to falling response rates²⁹⁷), this is offset by the fact that the data presented are three-year rolling averages (2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23).

Employment Insecurity and Dependent Self-Employment

In section 2.6 we first estimate the prevalence of ZHCs in Islington from the LFS/APS quality of work indicators from 2021, which therefore has a ‘low confidence’ attached to it for the reasons stated above. This is exacerbated by the fact that data on this measure was not collected in the 2018 quality of work indicators, meaning no comparison could be made. However, we also present the trend data for the use of zero-hour contracts in five of our focal industries over the period 2013-2024, which is considered ‘good’, even if the data is at a national level and we can only make inferences as to how this plays out in Islington.

For the estimates of part-time working in Islington and by sector we draw on BRES and LFS data accessed via the London Datastore²⁹⁸ and Nomis Labour Market Statistics²⁹⁹. In terms of the former, we would expect estimates to be less reliable at the small spatial scale, but while analysis of trend data does reveal variation in Islington over a 5-year period (2016-2021) this is within definite limits (7.4-15.4% of male residents engaged in part-time work, 17.5-28.7% of female residents). In terms of the latter, aggregating the data at a London-wide level for 2023 partially addresses concerns around the declining quality of the LFS. We therefore consider these estimates to be ‘fair’.

Finally, for self-employment, examining the trend data for Islington (estimated on the basis of the LFS/APS) over a 20-year period allows us to say with reasonable confidence that self-employment in the borough has broadly tracked upwards. Nevertheless, our estimate for the numbers of ‘dependent’ or ‘bogus’ self-employed has ‘low confidence’, based as it is on extrapolating from a national Citizens Advice survey from 2015³⁰⁰. While the methodological approach of that survey was reasonable – using the same questions as the HMRC Employment Status Indicator tool – it has a small sample size (491), is clearly dated and fails to account for local geographies.

Discrimination and Harassment

In section 2.7 the data we present on gender pay gaps in the borough are based on 5-year averages of ASHE data (2019-2023) and the reliability can therefore be taken as ‘good’.

296 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/lfs/index.htm>

297 see for example, ONS (2023) ‘Labour Force Survey: planned improvements and its reintroduction’, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyplannedimprovementsanditsreintroduction>

298 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-self-employed-full-time-and-part-time-and-gender-borough>

299 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/wfjsa>

300 Citizens Advice (2015) *Neither one thing nor the other: how reducing bogus self-employment could benefit workers, business and the Exchequer*, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/Neither%20one%20thing%20nor%20the%20other.pdf> p. 11.



The estimates of workplace sexual harassment are taken ComRes survey commissioned by the BBC in 2017 with a quota sample of over 6,000³⁰¹. However, while the finding that hospitality, IT and services have the highest rates of sexual harassment has been confirmed by more recent surveys³⁰², there is a lack of confirmatory data on the disproportionate prevalence of sexual harassment in London. Overall, this in an under-researched area, there is a complete lack of data at a small spatial scale and these estimates are no more than ‘fair’.

In terms of the working age employment rates by ethnicity we have again used 5-year aggregated data from the LFS/APS (2018-2022)³⁰³, which helps address issues of small sub-sample sizes and the declining quality of the LFS/APS. We therefore consider these estimates to be ‘good’. In the same section we present data on the hourly income gap by ethnicity for 2022³⁰⁴, which can also be considered ‘good’, based as it is on London-wide data.

Absence of Worker Voice

Although the estimates of union membership at a national and regional levels and across all industries in section 2.8 may be considered robust, the Labour Force Survey does not provide reliable estimates at the most local level. For this reason, we draw upon research from the Wales Institute of Social and Economics Research and Data (WISERD) to estimate union membership amongst Islington residents³⁰⁵. While the estimates for local authorities are model-based and experimental, they are based on averages over very long time periods (2000-2021 for estimates of collective agreement coverage, union coverage, presence and density, and comparing 2000-2010 and 2011-2021 for estimating union membership change). While this obviously means a less current picture of what is happening at the LA level, the reliability is ‘fair’.

Impacts of Welfare Conditionality

The unemployment rate in section 2.9 is derived from the LFS and may suffer from the issues outlined above. However, the claimant count should be considered an accurate measure of the number of people claiming defined benefits in a specific area³⁰⁶. We would judge the former estimate to be ‘fair’ and the latter to be ‘good’.

Conclusion

Ultimately what these analyses demonstrate are the challenges of trying to construct local labour market profiles on the basis of national surveys which are either unreliable at the small spatial scale (due to small sample sizes), are of declining quality (due to rising non-response rates) or simply do not record data on the kinds of employment rights violations we are interested in here. Nonetheless, it is our view that as long as we appreciate these limitations, this kind of exercise does give us a baseline to build upon as further national datasets become available, or local surveys are undertaken.

301 ComRes (2017) BBC: *Sexual harassment in the workplace 2017* (1 December 2017), <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/poll/bbc-sexual-harassment-in-the-work-place-2017/>

302 Government Equalities Office (2020) 2020 Sexual Harassment Survey, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f03e068fa8f50c77458285/2021-07-12_Sexual_Harassment_Report_FINAL.pdf

303 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-rates-by-ethnicity>

304 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/ethnicitypaygapsuk2012to2022>

305 Davies R Bryson A and Jones S (2022) *Geographical Variations in Trade Union Membership 2000-2021*, Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), Cardiff University.

306 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/outofworkbenefits/methodologies/claimantcount/unemploymentandtheclaimantcounttcm77327614tcm77387938.pdf>

6.2. Union Success Stories in the London Borough of Islington

Beginning with the NEU, we were provided with the example of a unionisation campaign at STEM6 in LBI³⁰⁷, now known as Tech City College. One of the challenges for the teaching unions over the last twenty years has been proliferation of academies (from 2000) and free schools (from 2010). These schools and colleges are outside of LA control and are not statutorily required to follow the national schoolteacher pay provisions³⁰⁸. The unions are therefore often in the position of having to firstly win recognition, and then win adoption of the national pay scales. In addition to these issues at STEM6, there were also concerns around extremely limited annual and sick leave allowances, and de facto ZHCs.

From 2013 onwards the NEU began to recruit teachers at the college and later took industrial action to win recognition and national terms and conditions, with the GMB also winning recognition for support staff³⁰⁹. The NEU representative said that critical to these efforts was teachers in the borough being aware that there was someone to whom they could just pick up the phone and ‘talk to them about what they can go and do in their own workplace, and how they go about organising it’, regardless of the absence of an organised branch in their workplace.

Keeping with the theme of education, we also spoke to representatives of the UCU at City and Islington College (part of the Capital City College Group). In a sector which – partly as a result of government funding cuts – has seen some of the worst erosion in pay levels across the economy over the last ten years³¹⁰, this UCU branch has won some of the largest pay increases in the sector³¹¹. The branch has also won a process for moving staff on precarious contracts into permanent roles³¹². This has been achieved with very high levels of membership density – far above the sector averages.

UCU representatives at the college ascribed these wins to ‘[t]wo things. Basic hard graft and politics’. Hard graft meant continuously working to involve members in the union branch, reminding them of meetings, and winning their support for policy positions. The politics meant seizing the terrain of debate from the employer, by focusing firstly on the quality of the education that is being provided, and only secondarily on the terms and conditions of their membership. This involves looking at how decisions made by the employer and the government (as the primary funder of Further Education) will impact on the students and the wider community. As an example of the latter, the representative pointed to local UCU campaigning with community partners around cuts to ESOL³¹³.

307 Polianskaya A (2013) ‘Science and Technology Academy to open in Islington’s Tech City’, 6th March, <https://islingtonnow.co.uk/science-and-technology-academy-to-open-in-islington-tech-city/>

308 <https://neu.org.uk/advice/your-rights-work/pay/pay-scales>

309 Garner R (2014) ‘Teachers at flagship Islington free school vote to strike over new “zero hour” job terms’, 28th January, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-at-flagship-islington-free-school-vote-to-strike-over-new-zero-hour-job-terms-9089009.html>

310 Glover E (2022) ‘The Further Education Fightback’, 20th October, *Tribune*, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/10/the-further-education-fightback>

311 FE News (2022) ‘Staff at Capital City College Group win significant pay deal’, 11th July, <https://www.fenews.co.uk/work-leadership/staff-at-capital-city-college-group-win-significant-pay-deal/>

312 Vernell S and Grundle C (2018) ‘Historic deal at CCCG’, *UCU Left*, <https://uculeft.org/historic-deal-at-cccg/>

313 TES (2011) ‘Esol cuts “not thought through”, claims Niace’, 18th February, <https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/esol-cuts-not-thought-through-claims-niace>

Turning to the GMB, this union has won a range of victories for its members in and around LBI. A particularly important example has been building their membership and winning recognition for traffic wardens outsourced via NSL. This was subsequently followed by an increase in pay worth 40%³¹⁴ that is very likely to take them significantly above the LLW by April 2025. This is a very important win for a group of workers who tend to be disproportionately of a migrant and/or minoritised ethnic background.

Not only did the GMB achieve these successes, but they have also built the necessary structures of stewards and regular meetings to ensure that union organisation is sustainable, '[a]s soon as a new person starts, they introduce themselves. Because that nature of business, there's a big turnaround, so it's important to have reps there to get the new people in, otherwise you become unbalanced again'. Other examples for GMB include winning recognition for security personnel at Arsenal Football Club³¹⁵ and later helping secure the LLW³¹⁶, and alongside Usdaw and Unite, helping secure the LLW in supermarkets, which is incredibly significant in terms of the numbers of workers involved.

Unison has played an important role over many years campaigning for the LA to bring services back in-house, and the work done by the Council in this regard has been acknowledged in research produced by the union³¹⁷. The union has also campaigned around the Ethical Care Charter³¹⁸, which the Council has made significant inroads into implementing (even as the union acknowledges that some gaps remain, a point noted above). Beyond this work around council services, the local Unison branches have also long been engaged in campaigning around the rights of Teaching Assistants, who often face poor terms and conditions³¹⁹.

Turning to Unite, the union has recently achieved successes in the historically un-unionised 'not-for-profit' sector, including organisations that have a footprint in LBI such as the homeless charity St Mungo's, achieving an inflation beating pay rise in 2023³²⁰. This follows earlier successful action by workers at Shelter³²¹. Unite have also won in-sourcing campaigns in neighbouring London boroughs, such as the parking service in Hackney³²² and elsewhere across London, including the Woolwich Ferry³²³. In terms of hospitality, Unite has campaigned against unfair tip policies, and in addition to winning improved outcomes for workers at specific companies, has also managed to influence national legislation³²⁴. It has also led historic disputes at chains such as TGI Fridays³²⁵ and won recognition at the Dalston Superstore (as discussed above).

314 GMB (2023) 'Islington Traffic Wardens win bumper 40 per cent pay rise', 13th October, <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/islington-traffic-wardens-win-bumper-40-per-cent-pay-rise>

315 GMB (2020) 'GMB London welcomes the decision by Arsenal Football Club to sign a recognition agreement with the union', 11th November, <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-london-welcomes-the-decision-by-arsenal-football-club-to-sign-a-recognition-agreement-with-the-union>

316 Lamche A (2023) 'Now agency workers at Emirates Stadium on match days score London Living Wage', *Islington Tribune*, <https://www.islingtontribune.co.uk/article/now-agency-workers-at-emirates-stadium-on-match-days-score-london-living-wage>

317 APSE (2011) *The value of returning local authority services in-house in an era of budget constraints*, <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/insourcing-update-the-value-of-returning-local-authority-services-in-house-in-an-era-of-budget-constraints/>

318 <https://www.unison.org.uk/care-workers-your-rights/the-ethical-care-charter/>

319 <https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/national/24282556.teaching-assistants-increasingly-leading-lessons-amid-teacher-shortage---union/>

320 Unite (2023) 'Unite secures inflation beating pay deal to end long running strike at St Mungo's charity', 25th August, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/august/unite-secures-inflation-beating-pay-deal-to-end-long-running-strike-at-st-mungo-s-charity>

321 Unite (2023) 'Shelter pay dispute ends as workers receive improved offer', 12th January, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/january/shelter-pay-dispute-ends-as-workers-receive-improved-offer>

322 Unite (2021) 'Hackney parking wardens seek pay justice in last year of outsourcer's contract', 5th July, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2021/july/hackney-parking-wardens-seek-pay-justice-in-last-year-of-outsourcer-s-contract>

323 <https://unitedleft.org.uk/outsource-woolwich-ferry-service-taken-back-inhouse-by-transport-for-london/>

324 Unite (2024) 'Fresh delays to fair tips legislation slated by Unite', 24th April, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2024/april/fresh-delays-to-fair-tips-legislation-slated-by-unite>

325 Unite (2018) 'Workers at TGI Fridays to strike for historic fifth time', 10th August, <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2018/august/workers-at-tgi-fridays-to-strike-for-historic-fifth-time>



Unite have also been very active in terms of challenging welfare reforms that have negatively impacted their members. They are running a national campaign, 'Cut Sanctions, Not Incomes'³²⁶ and are representing their members who are being unfairly sanctioned or subject to unreasonable UC conditions. Nevertheless, there are challenges around public knowledge of the impacts of welfare reform and union officials consider that a key priority is to educate members, representatives and public bodies about the operation of UC. In this respect officials are offering to engage with key stakeholders in LBI to inform best practice and ways forward to oppose UC conditionality.

In terms of the RMT, this union has consistently campaigned against the out-sourcing of cleaning staff on the London Underground³²⁷ and has had a number of successes over the years in winning the LLW for outsourced cleaners, security and caterers across London transport and national rail contracts. Most recently, in 2023, following years of campaigning by the RMT, the Mayor of London announced that free staff travel would be extended to the lowest paid workers on the Transport for London (TfL) network³²⁸. All of this is in addition to the pay increases the union has negotiated for directly employed staff on London Underground³²⁹ and mainline rail services.

Finally, turning to ACORN, the community union, it has developed in LBI over the last 12 months, engaging in door-to-door outreach ('door-knocking') to address issues faced by LBI residents relating to housing and other community issues. They have also taken referrals from the community outreach organisation Help on Your Doorstep³³⁰. The work the union undertakes ranges from advocacy on behalf of their members facing issues around housing repairs (waiting times and quality of repairs) to eviction resistance cases (where a tenant is being unfairly evicted and may not know their legal rights) – in one instance winning a Polish mum a 3-month extension to her tenancy.

326 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/unite-against-sanctions>

327 RMT (2020) *Dirty Work: ABM and the outsourcing of London's Underground cleaners*, <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/publications/dirty-work-abm-and-the-outsourcing-of-londons-underground/>

328 Smythe P (2023) 'Free Travel Is Being Used to Make Outsourced Transport Staff Work Harder', 27th September, *Novara Media*, <https://novaramedia.com/2023/09/27/free-travel-is-being-used-to-make-outsourced-transport-staff-work-harder/>

329 <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/members-updates/rates-of-pay-and-conditions-of-service-2023-lul081123/>

330 <https://www.helponyourdoorstep.com/>

6.3. Engaging with ‘difficult-to-organise’ workers

6.3.1. Unite – Migrant Workers’ Branch, United Migrant Workers Education Project and Recognition at the Dalston Superstore

Unite has three projects or campaigns based in and around LBI that are pertinent to our research. The first is a **Unite branch for migrant workers** focused on northeast London and initially centred on the Turkish and Kurdish communities³³¹; this is now open to migrants of all backgrounds. The branch developed out of a relationship between the union and the Day-Mer community organisation³³² which serves the needs of primarily Kurdish, Turkish, Cypriot and Alawite communities.

In making the first steps to set-up the branch it was helpful that Unite had full-time and lay officials who came from these communities, and had a history of organising with them. These connections and the support of Day-Mer have been crucial, as a Unite official noted: ‘What was an advantage was that the people we were working with knew the community well anyway, so we weren’t seen as outsiders parachuting in’.

In describing the development of the branch, the Unite official stressed the importance of organising around a community, rather than the traditional model of organising based on a workplace or even a single sector. This is thought to be a more effective way of building solidarity between workers in small businesses where it may (at least initially) be difficult to achieve a significant membership in any single workplace.

Unite have grown the branch through ‘old-fashioned street leafletting and just [going] to speak to members of the community, handing out leaflets’. The official we spoke to stressed the importance of getting out and meeting people, as well as building trust through giving out advice, translating leaflets into Kurdish and Turkish and offering training sessions on employment rights at times and in (community) settings that are appropriate for the membership.

In the second example from Unite, the **United Migrant Workers Education Project** was established in 2009 as a non-profit organisation sponsored by Unite. It is an alternative education project that delivers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and arts classes. The project is staffed by a team of volunteers who lead classes every Saturday, based at Unite offices in Holborn. The project is targeted towards cleaners and domestic staff working in central London locations, who are migrants and could be classed as vulnerable workers.

As part of the project, Unite offers a surgery for workers who face a variety of issues relating to their employment. As another Unite official told us:

[[If you’re a cleaner in London you will go there and meet with an officer and an activist and go, “[...] I’ve been dismissed,” and they will go, “We will get you representation next week.” Because there are language issues. There are issues of access. And so they know that that’s where they go.

331 <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2021/april/unite-steps-up-campaign-to-tackle-employment-abuses-of-turkishkurdish-community-in-london>

332 <https://daymer.org/>

The same official told us that this loose network also allows for community-building activities to be undertaken, including social activities such as ‘trips to the seaside together’.

The third example is the organising success and recognition agreement with the famous queer venue, **Dalston Superstore**³³³, which sits just beyond Islington’s borders in Hackney. A Unite official told us that the union was approached by the workers there, who had grievances over lower rates of pay for probationary staff, lack of staff facilities, and increased working pressures during the Covid-19 pandemic. The workers were also interested in creating a more sustainable model of employment in hospitality, given that it can be challenging for queer workers to change jobs because they are starting from scratch in terms of having to explain their identity to managers and coworkers.

At the same time, the official was clear that there was a need to overcome some of the perceptions amongst the queer workforce that the union movement has not always been as open to LGBT+ concerns as it could be. These barriers could only be surmounted through building trust with the queer community: ‘So there was a lot of talk about community, and their community leaders within what they identified as their community, and how would we support that community’.

Ultimately the campaign with the Dalston Superstore workers was a huge success. Not only has the union won safe transport home at night for the workers (representing a significant investment by the employer), but the recognition agreement provides a sustainable structure of workplace reps, who can continue to build the union to ensure – given the very high levels of staff turnover in the industry – they continue to recruit members and campaign over the long term. Given the high profile of the Superstore as a venue, the union campaign won a lot of publicity and gained relevance amongst young people who are disproportionately un-unionised.

6.3.2. IWGB – Community Building and Courier Organising in Islington

The IWGB have built a significant section of their membership amongst workers who have traditionally been thought of as ‘difficult-to-organise’, including migrant workers and workers of colour in precarious situations. Describing sections of their membership, the IWGB national officer noted that the private hire industry is ‘98% global majority’, with many of the workers coming from North, West and East Africa, as well as South East Asia, while many of the security guards they represent are West African.

The union’s successes³³⁴ include taking the first ever strike action by workers in the gig economy in 2016³³⁵, winning the first ever recognition deal in the gig economy in 2018³³⁶, winning ‘worker’ status for gig economy couriers at City Sprint in 2020³³⁷, and undertaking the longest gig economy strike in UK history in 2021/2022³³⁸.

333 Erdem N and Barnett M (2022) ‘How Superstore Became a Union Bar’, 10th August, *Tribune*, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/08/dalston-superstore-unite-the-union-hospitality-work>

334 See also: <https://iwgb.org.uk/en/page/history/>

335 Osborne H (2016) ‘Deliveroo workers strike again over new pay structure’, 15th August, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/aug/15/deliveroo-workers-strike-again-over-new-pay-structure>

336 Chapman B (2018) ‘Gig economy ruling: Couriers carrying blood for NHS win right to collective bargaining’, 1st March, *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/nhs-gig-economy-couriers-blood-transfusions-union-recognition-the-doctors-laboratory-a8235446.html>

337 IWGB (2020) ‘IWGB wins worker status and rights for “gig economy” CitySprint couriers once and for all’, 6th August, <https://iwgb.org.uk/en/post/iwgb-wins-worker-status-and-rights-for-gig-economy-citysprint-couriers-once-and-for-all/>

338 Cant C (2021) ‘Sheffield Food Couriers Are Waging the Longest Strike in the History of the Gig Economy’, 16th December, *Novara Media*, <https://novaramedia.com/2021/12/16/sheffield-delivery-workers-strike/>



In building the union around these kinds of campaigns, the IWGB stressed the importance of direct engagement with workers through, e.g., community events. They bring Londoners from diverse backgrounds together to celebrate different cultural influences, listen to music and share meals.

The union also runs language lessons every two weeks at a community space in Aldgate, utilised mostly by cleaners. It also works with other organisations to deliver training in that forum around issues such as housing rights.

The union has produced a dedicated information portal – The Migrant Workers Guide³³⁹ – for its predominantly migrant membership, and has looked to work with other organisations (such as the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants³⁴⁰) to sign post workers to appropriate sources of support for healthcare, education and immigration advice. Moreover, the union has produced an Employment Rights Manual in Spanish³⁴¹ and one of the union's two legal teams are entirely bilingual (English and Spanish).

The final component of the IWGB's strategy is to build worker confidence around small wins. In the case of gig economy employers it may mean not initially targeting the employer/contractor, but other actors and issues that impact upon the workers' terms and conditions, such as restaurants mistreating workers or denying them access to the toilet, or lack of parking places which leads to fines and lost earnings.

Moreover, following the murder of courier Takieddine Boudhane in LBI in 2020 during a road-rage incident³⁴², the IWGB worked with the Council to deliver an outreach project centred on predominately Algerian couriers working around Blackstock Road. This led to some important successes, including signposting workers to a range of support services, fostering a sense of community (including through regular football games) and securing dedicated courier parking from the Council at Highbury Corner ('where they can actually put mopeds while they're going in for delivery rather than risking it on red routes').

Nevertheless, this project also encountered some challenges, which centred on the fact that the IWGB were partially taking over an existing project, which had different aims and objectives to unionising the workforce. In the view of the union the project did not quite achieve the necessary balance between 'service provision' (providing support and solving problems) and 'organising', in the sense of empowering workers to take actions for themselves to improve their working conditions. It is the union's view that there is a need to develop a 'worker-leader' from amongst their existing membership in order to place any subsequent project on a stronger footing.

339 <https://iwgb.org.uk/en/page/mwg/>

340 <https://jcw.org.uk/>

341 <https://cdn.iwgb.org.uk/bucket/Handbook/LegalHandbook/Manualdederechoslaborales-tupago.pdf>

342 BBC News (2022) 'Deliveroo driver murder: Man jailed for life for road-rage killing', 25th August, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-62670584>

Glossary

ACAS: Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service - An non-departmental public body providing free advice and support relating to employment rights and industrial relations in the UK.

ACL: Adult Community Learning - Educational programs for adults, often provided by local authorities or charities.

AET: Administrative Earnings Threshold - A threshold in Universal Credit for determining claimants' work search requirements.

ASHE: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings – The most comprehensive source of data on the structure and distribution of earnings in the UK.

ASLEF: Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen - A trade union for train drivers.

BAME: Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic - A term used in the UK to refer to ethnic groups other than White British.

BAMER: Black and Minority Ethnic Refugees - A term referring to minority ethnic groups and refugees.

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation - The UK's public service broadcaster.

BFAWU: Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union - A trade union representing workers in the food industry.

BRES: Business Register and Employment Survey – Provides data on employees and employment by detailed geography and industrial sectors.

CA: Citizens Advice - A UK charity offering free advice social welfare advice, including employment and consumer rights issues.

CAI: Citizens Advice Islington - A local branch of Citizens Advice serving the London Borough of Islington.

CCLAC: City Community Legal Advice Centre - A legal advice service based at City University of London offering free help to those in need.

CLES: Centre for Local Economic Strategies - A think tank focused on local economic development and policy.

CLF: Central London Forward - A partnership of central London local authorities aimed at driving economic growth and job creation.

CVS: Community and Volunteer Sector – Charities and third sector organisations offering services and providing support in the community.

CWU: Communication Workers Union - A trade union representing workers in the postal and telecommunications industries.

DWP: Department for Work and Pensions - The UK government department responsible for welfare and pension policy.



EHRC: Equalities and Human Rights Commission - An non-departmental public body promoting equality and human rights in the UK.

ELAS: Employment Law Advice Service - A service ran by Citizens Advice Islington and the Royal Courts of Justice Advice - Citizens Advice and Law Centre offering legal advice on employment-related matters.

ESA: Employment and Support Allowance - A UK benefit for individuals unable to work due to illness or disability.

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages - Courses and qualifications designed to help non-native English speakers improve their language skills.

FIS: Family Information Service - An Islington Council service providing information about services for families, such as childcare and family support.

GLA: Greater London Authority - The regional governance body responsible for strategic planning in London.

GMB: General, Municipal, Boilermakers Union - A general trade union in the UK.

HMRC: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs - The UK government department responsible for tax collection and administration.

HR: Human Resources - The department in an organization responsible for employee management, including hiring and welfare.

HSWA: Health and Safety at Work Act - UK legislation ensuring workplace health, safety, and welfare.

HSE: Health and Safety Executive - The UK government body responsible for the regulation and enforcement of workplace health, safety, and welfare.

HYOD: Help on Your Doorstep - A charity working to help Islington residents access services and support.

IBAA: Islington BAME Advice Alliance - a coalition of non-profit organisations that offer advisory services to BAME and refugee communities residing in the London borough of Islington.

IC: Islington Council - The governing body for the London Borough of Islington.

ILAC: Islington Legal Advice Centre - A local organization providing free legal advice to Islington residents.

ILC: Islington Law Centre - A community law centre providing free legal advice and representation in Islington.

ILO: International Labour Organisation - A UN agency focused on setting international labour standards.

IMAX: Islington Council Income Maximisation Team - A program aimed at helping residents maximize their 'benefits' and tax credits entitlement through advice and support.

IWS: Intensive Work Search - The requirement for welfare claimants to undertake up to 35 hours per week of work-related activities (i.e. searching and applying for jobs).



IPR: Islington People's Rights - A charity providing advice on welfare benefits and debt in Islington.

ITUC: Islington Trades Union Council - The local representative body of the Trades Union Congress representing workers in Islington.

IWGB: Independent Workers Union of Great Britain - A trade union representing gig economy and precarious workers.

LA: Local Authority – Administrative bodies responsible for local areas in the UK.

LBI: London Borough of Islington - The local authority governing the London Borough of Islington.

LFS: Labour Force Survey - A survey conducted to gather employment, unemployment, and economic activity data in the UK.

LLW: London Living Wage - A higher wage rate than the national living wage, reflecting the higher cost of living in London.

LGBT+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, plus other sexual and gender identities.

LPC: Low Pay Commission – The independent body that advises the government on the National Minimum Wage.

LUS: London Unemployed Strategies - A group representing unemployed people's rights in London.

LWI: Learning & Work Institute - A charity dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment, and inclusion.

LW: Living Wage - The wage rate considered necessary to meet the basic cost of living.

LWN: Local Wellbeing Networks – Networks convened by Islington Council, Volunatry Action Islington and Octopus Community Networks focused on promoting and improving well-being within local communities.

MIW: Make it Work - An initiative focused on supporting workers and businesses with employment or work-related issues, funded by the Big Lottery and delivered by Citizens Advice Islington between 2015 and 2018.

MML: Marx Memorial Library - A library and archive dedicated to the study of socialism and labour history.

NEET: 'Young People' (aged 16-24) who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.

NEU: National Education Union - A UK trade union for teachers and education staff.

NSL: A provider of outsourced business services to the public and private sectors.

NTE: Night-Time Economy - The sector of the economy that operates primarily during the night, such as bars, clubs, and entertainment venues.

PAYE: Pay As You Earn – the system whereby employers and pension providers automatically deduct Income Tax and National Insurance contributions.



PPS: Progressive Procurement Strategy - A strategy for socially responsible procurement in public sector organizations.

RIDDOR: Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations - UK regulations requiring employers to report certain serious workplace incidents.

RMT: National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers - A trade union representing workers in transport.

TPA: TaxPayers' Alliance - a pressure group campaigning for lower taxation.

TSSA: Transport Salaried Staffs' Association - A trade union for workers in the transport and travel industries.

TfL: Transport for London.

TU: Trade Union - An organization representing the interests of workers.

TUC: Trades Union Congress - The national trade union federation in the UK.

TULCRA: Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 - Key legislation for regulating trade unions in the UK.

UC: Universal Credit - A UK government welfare benefit that replaces several other benefits with one monthly payment.

UCU: University and College Union - A trade union representing staff in post-16 education.

UK: United Kingdom - The sovereign country made up of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

UKSPF: UK Shared Prosperity Fund - A UK government fund aimed at boosting local economies across the country.

Unison: A UK trade union representing public service workers.

Unite: Unite the Union - A British and Irish general trade union.

Usdaw: Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers - A trade union representing retail and distribution workers in the UK.

WBG: Women's Budget Group - An independent, non-profit organization that analyses economic policy from a gender perspective.

WISERD: Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data - A research institute focused on social and economic research in Wales.

ZHC: Zero Hours Contracts - Employment contracts with no guaranteed hours, offering flexibility to both employers and employees (but potentially also representing insecurity to the latter).

