## Greater Manchester Law Centre Manifesto Launch: “Solidarity, not sympathy!”

## 12th April 2019

On Thursday 11th April, the Greater Manchester Law Centre (GMLC) launched their manifesto at a public event. 150 people were in attendance, and speakers included **GMLC Patron and human rights lawyer Robert Lizar** and **GMLC trustee Sukhdeep Singh**. GMLC’s housing solicitor, **Kathleen Cosgrove**, spoke alongside **Stacie Martindale**, who GMLC have been representing in a homeless shelter case[[1]](#footnote-1).

“We need community law centres to ensure people's legal rights.” “We demand the full restoration of legal aid and a new generation of social welfare lawyers, the legal right to a secure home for all and an end to the hostile environment inflicted on benefit claimants and migrants”

These were some of the messages from the Greater Manchester Law Centre – “Fighting Together for Free Access to Justice” – at a packed meeting of students, advisers, lawyers and community groups last night in Manchester:

GMLC opened in September 2016 following a community campaign for free access to justice. “This manifesto launch is about what we’re fighting for, how we do it and how people can join us”, said John Nicholson, chair of GMLC: “We have a vision for a fairer society, and we have a part to play. While parliament continues to dither and delay in “debating” exit from the EU, people in local communities are suffering […] We need action to tackle these problems now. People should not have to rely on charity and foodbanks. People need legal rights and they need properly funded community law centres working with them to demand their rights are fulfilled.”

Robert Lizar addressed not only the decimation of legal aid but how assistance is not the same as agency: “The unrealised potential of legal advice work is not that it can remedy the structural causes of poverty and bad housing, but it has the capacity to lay them bare.”

Richard Burgon MP, Shadow Justice Minister, was due to attend and speak but was prevented at the last minute by the parliamentary commitments related to the EU proceedings. He sent his own message of support: “I am working closely with the Law Centres Network to produce a detailed plan of how the next Labour Government will boost existing Law Centres and create more Law Centres in our communities. … Your Law Centre Manifesto will no doubt play a central role in shaping provision across this country.”

GMLC campaign for the restoration of legal aid, as well as social and policy issues. “We challenge the injustices which bring people to us in the first place”, said Kathleen Cosgrove from GMLC. One of the demands is that everyone has the right to a secure home. Stacie Martindale movingly talked about the squat in Eccles, which they named “Saving People Homeless Project”, where she and other homeless people find shelter, and help each other rebulding a life for themselves after dehumanising experience living on the streets in Greater Manchester.

GMLC trustee Sukhdeep Singh spoke about GMLC’s anti-racist principles: “When the Windrush scandal was revealed, people from the local community were able to come to the law centre for information, advice and support ... Migrants, like benefit claimants, have been targeted and stigmatised, and its time for a complete change of government policy.”

Maxine Peake, one of the Patrons of GMLC, likewise had hoped to speak to the meeting, but she is currently preparing for the theatre in London and sent the following message: “Just to say I am so sorry not to be with you today. But I want to wish you all well with the magnificent manifesto launch. I am honoured to be connected to the law centre. It’s tremendous place full of the best of humanity.”

GMLC have premises in Moss Side, at 159 Princess Road, M14 4RE, and they provide free advice and representation primarily in housing and welfare benefits. They work with campaigning and community groups for social change. More information regarding volunteering, campaigning and fundraising can be found at [www.gmlaw.org.uk](http://www.gmlaw.org.uk).

## END

The full manifesto can be downloaded here: <https://issuu.com/astridjohnson/docs/greatermanchesterlawcentremanifesto>

Images of the event and the front cover of the Manifesto are enclosed as jpgs plus here a link to download further images: <https://we.tl/t-dEdCLE7NE5>.

*The Greater Manchester Law Centre provides free, face to face and independent legal advice and representation for the people of Greater Manchester, as well as being a campaign for justice and properly funded legal aid.*

**Contact:** [development@gmlaw.org.uk](mailto:development@gmlaw.org.uk)

**Tel:** 0161 769 2244, 0161 769 2246

**Facebook:** Facebook.com/gmlawcentre

**Twitter**: @gmlawcentre

**Web:** [www.gmlaw.org.uk](http://www.gmlaw.org.uk)

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The Greater Manchester Law Centre is a member of the Law Centres Network, [www.lawcentres.org.uk](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk) and Lexcel accredited by the Law Society.

1. <https://www.bigissuenorth.com/features/2019/03/diy-could-be-undone/>; <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/homeless-squatters-fighting-nhs-keep-15788773> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)