

Health and Work: A Local Perspective

Insights from Chapeltown and specialist employment advice



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Introduction

Health inequalities are the differences in health outcomes that are observed between various groups in society. These disparities can be observed between places, between different social groups, and across measures of things like income or deprivation, as well as environmental factors such as experiences of discrimination and employment conditions.

Good work is essential for a healthy life and was recognised in the [Marmot Review](#) - a landmark 2010 report on health inequalities in England - as a crucial factor in addressing the social determinants of health and reducing health inequalities. However, as our [recent report](#) illustrated, fair employment and quality jobs for all remain far from reality. This is especially the case for people who are already managing health problems and disabilities.

Across the UK, disabled people and those with long-term health conditions are [less likely to be in work](#) than their peers. But geography also plays a major role: where someone lives can affect both their health and their employment opportunities. In areas experiencing multiple forms of deprivation, people with poor health are [often overrepresented](#) in insecure, low-paid, or unsuitable work, or excluded from the labour market altogether due to a lack of appropriate local jobs.

Local context matters for shaping both health and employment outcomes. People across the UK face varying employment challenges - from weak local job markets to insecure, low-paid, inflexible or exploitative work, with some employers unwilling to make reasonable adjustments. These challenges can worsen existing health problems and inequalities, creating a cycle that's difficult to break.

Citizens Advice, with its strong network of local offices across England and Wales, supports thousands of people each year through these challenges. In 2024 alone, we helped **over 92,000 people with employment issues**. Our frontline local Citizens Advice offices - embedded in communities - are uniquely placed to observe how poor employment conditions and lack of opportunities intersect with health inequalities across different geographic areas.

This report takes a closer look at **Chapeltown, an area in the city of Leeds that experiences multiple forms of deprivation**, to explore these issues further. It is part of a wider [project](#) supported by the Health Foundation. We've chosen this area for our first local deep dive because Leeds contains some of the deepest pockets of poverty in the country, which contribute to widening health inequalities across the city. As a designated '[Marmot Place](#)', Leeds City Council is now strategically committed to tackling these inequalities in line with the principles set out by the Institute of Health Equity (IHE).

Chapeltown Citizens Advice offers a specialist employment advice service and plays an active role in addressing the root causes of poor health locally. This report draws on insights from our work there, alongside an in-depth interview with a specialist employment adviser. Their experience* in this role offered a unique perspective on the relationship between health and work. This report highlights key barriers people in disadvantaged areas face when trying to access good work, and the consequences this has for their health.

*This covers the period February 2024 to March 2025, when the interview was conducted.

Leeds context

Who we are and where we live has always mattered for our health and wellbeing. Leeds is a diverse city in West Yorkshire, with a population that experiences **significant pockets of poverty** and **deepening health inequalities**, according to recent research from the Institute of Health Equity (IHE):



Leeds is home to more than 820,000 people, with a growing population that faces **higher levels of poverty compared to the national average**.



Around **24%** of residents live in areas that are in the bottom **10%** of areas across England when ranked by Index of Multiple Deprivation score.



The number of people **experiencing severe deprivation in Leeds has been rising**, with estimates from the Office for National Statistics showing an increase from 179,000 in 2013 to 200,000 in 2022.



In 2024, 37% of children starting school in Reception came from the city's most disadvantaged areas, up from 34% in 2021.



The impact of deprivation is stark, particularly in life expectancy - women in the most deprived parts of Leeds live, on average, **nine years fewer** than those in the least deprived areas, while for men, the gap is even wider at **10 years**.

Health inequalities in Leeds: policy context

Leeds became a 'Marmot Place' in 2023, highlighting the local governments commitment to strategically tackling health inequalities. Through its two-year partnership with the IHE, the city is conducting a 'whole-system review' that integrates data analysis, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term policy commitments to address health disparities between the poorest and wealthiest in the city.

The Leeds Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2030 states: **'Leeds will be a healthy and caring city for all ages, where people who are the poorest improve their health the fastest'**. However, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing cost-of-living crisis, health inequalities have intensified, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions.

Leeds' Marmot Place status signifies an explicit commitment to monitoring and reducing health inequalities over a 5-10 year period. The local policy framework includes:

1. Strengthening leadership and accountability for health equity.
2. Enhancing stakeholder understanding of social determinants of health.
3. Implementing strategic initiatives across sectors, particularly in employment, housing, and early childhood.

This involves identifying leaders to improve understanding of health inequalities across stakeholders and committing to consistently hold the city system accountable for tackling inequalities.

Chapeltown

Chapeltown is an area to the North East of central Leeds that reflects the wider inequalities of the city. It forms part of a primary care network (PCN) with the more affluent area of Chapel Allerton. Across the PCN as a whole, **56% of residents live in areas that are within the most deprived fifths of all areas in the country**, whilst 30% live in areas amongst the two least deprived fifths. It is also racially diverse, with 45% of all residents in the wider Chapel Allerton ward being from racially minoritised groups.

Publicly available [health data](#) shows that people who live in the parts of Leeds experiencing the most deprivation (including Chapeltown) face significantly higher rates of illness, relative to the city as a whole, including:

- **43%** higher rate of diabetes
- **20%** higher rate of strokes
- **23%** higher rate of heart disease
- **51%** higher rate of severe mental illness



"Chapeltown is a deprived area, with people coming through who not only do they have employment issues, but some of them have health conditions and health concerns as well. So not only are they having the employment issue, they also have the underlying health conditions, and when you put those two together, it creates further challenges for the clients" - Specialist employment adviser

Chapeltown Citizens Advice

Chapeltown Citizens Advice is part of a **network of 239 independent local Citizens Advice charities**, operating through 511 offices across communities in England and Wales.

Chapeltown Citizens Advice provides an employment advice service, encompassing a specialist employment adviser who supports clients facing a range of workplace issues. We spoke to this adviser extensively as part of this research. Whilst the service advises people from all different types of sectors, they largely see individuals working in low-paid, insecure jobs and sectors. These jobs often involve zero-hour or agency contracts, limited worker protections, and little flexibility.

The clients that seek employment support are predominantly from communities in Chapeltown who experience deprivation, including a high proportion of residents from racially minoritised groups, or with limited English language skills. In the past year alone, the service has supported **over 1,115 people** with employment-related problems.

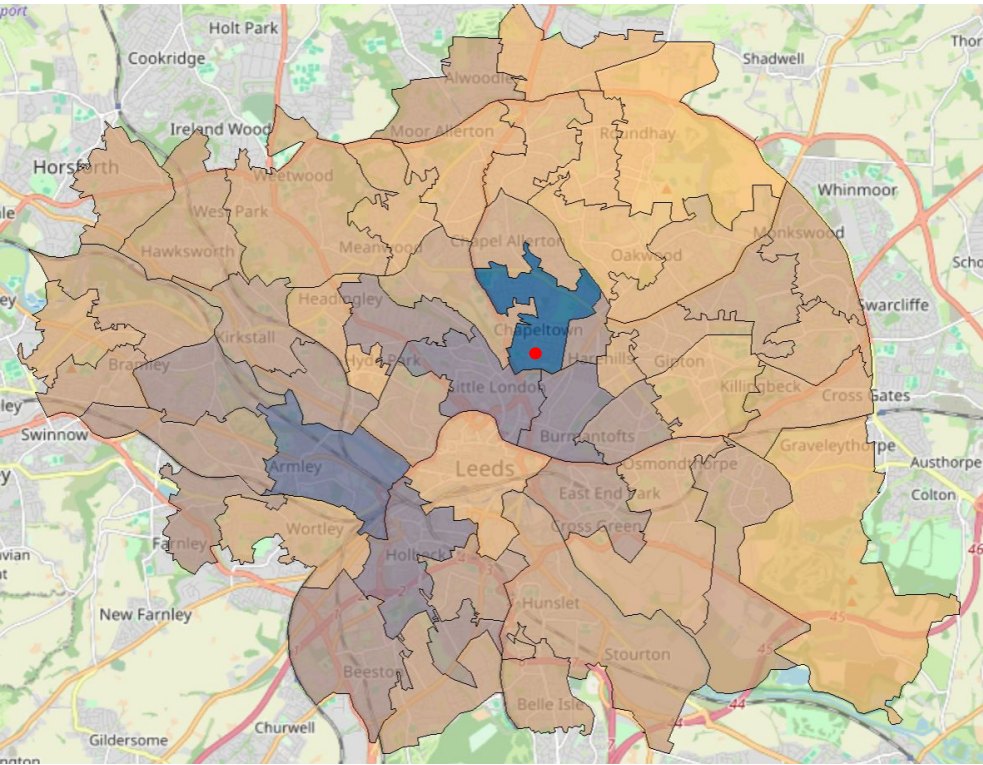
The most common issues the specialist employment adviser encounters relate broadly to poor working conditions, wage disputes, and inadequate support for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. These reflect wider patterns of employment injustice that disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities. These frontline insights reveal a systemic problem, in which areas like Chapeltown face higher rates of job insecurity, contributing to poorer health outcomes and deepening existing health inequalities.

"Many [clients] have underlying health conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes, which also disproportionately affect ethnic minorities. Poverty also impacts mental health, which in turn affects overall well-being and can reduce life expectancy due to deprivation."

Visualising Chapeltown

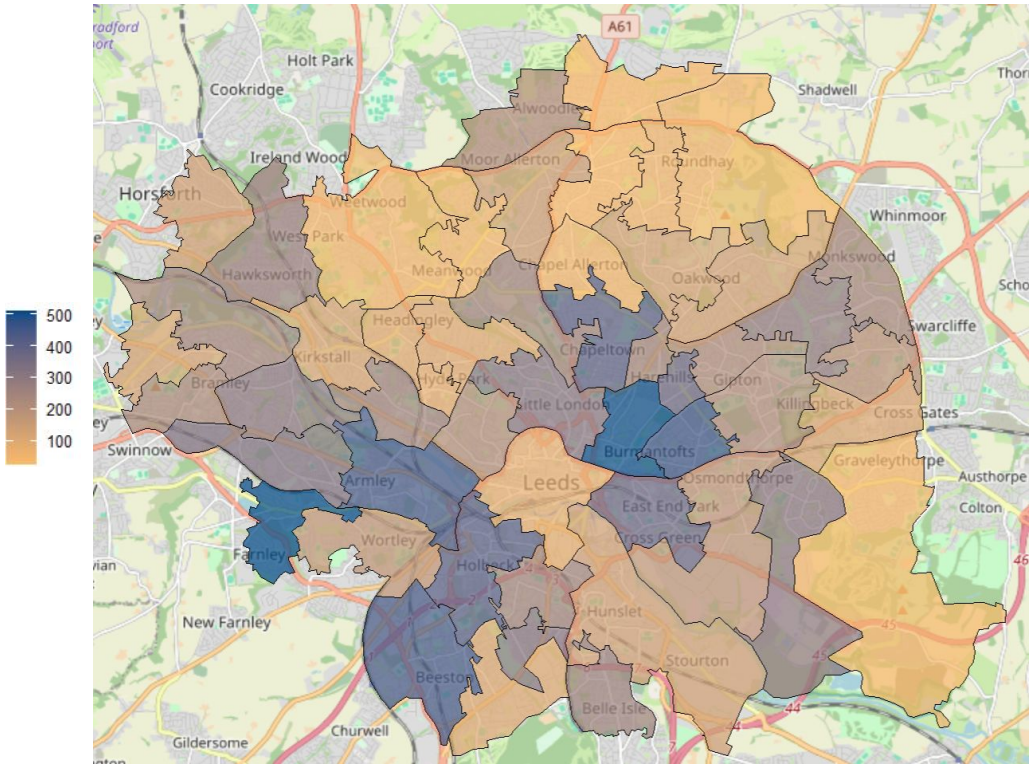
The map below on the left highlights the location of Chapeltown within Leeds, and sheds light on the need for specialist employment support within this location. They also reveal the extent to which the area served by Chapeltown LCA experiences multiple forms of deprivation. The map on the right shows the number of times we need to help people secure charitable support or help from a food bank across different areas of Leeds. Between them, these two maps illustrate the relationship between a need for employment support and economic deprivation.

Number of employment cases per MSOA* since 2023



• Location of Chapeltown Citizens Advice

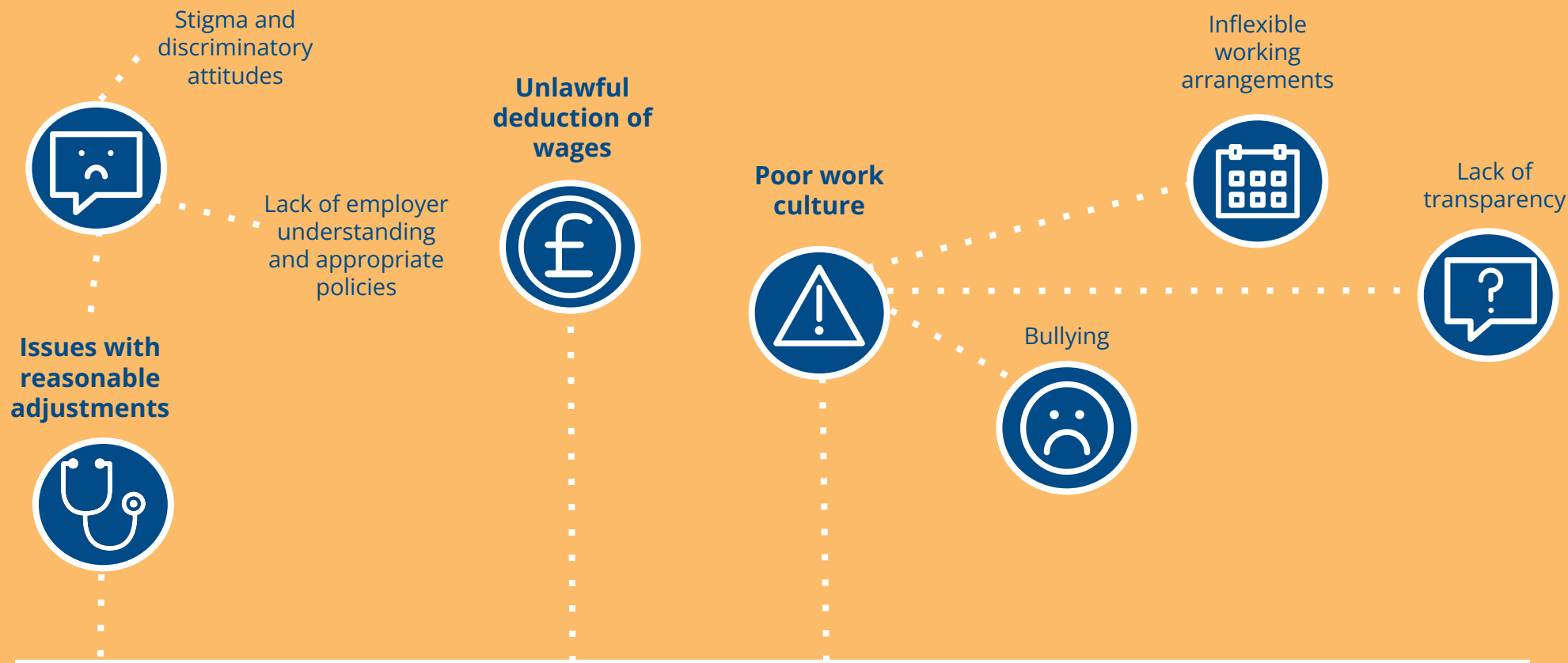
Number of foodbanks or charitable support referrals per MSOA* since 2023



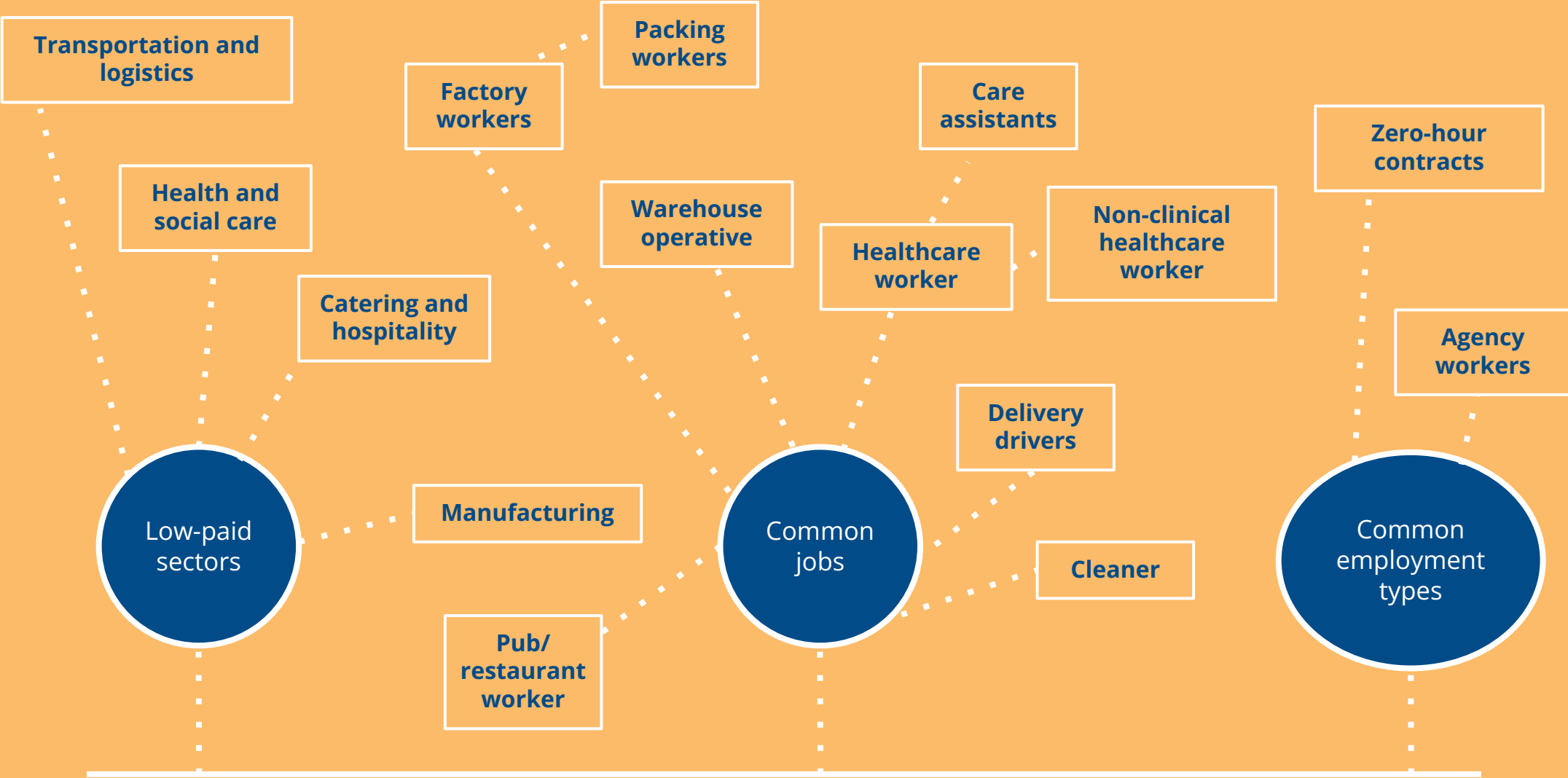
* MSOA = Middle Layer Super Output Area. Statistical areas each containing between 5000 - 15000 residents

Common employment issues at Chapeltown Citizens Advice

This report explores some of the most common employment issues the specialist employment service at Chapeltown Citizens Advice advise on, including problems with reasonable adjustments, unlawful wage deductions, poor workplace culture - such as bullying, inflexible working arrangements, and a lack of transparency. As we will see in the following pages, these issues can have a significant negative impact on people's health outcomes, contributing to stress, anxiety, and overall reduced wellbeing.



Common sectors, jobs and employment types in Chapeltown



Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are a legal requirement brought in by the Equality Act (2010), intended to help people with health conditions or disabilities stay in work by removing barriers that put them at a disadvantage. The specialist employment adviser reports that, in practice, **failure to secure reasonable adjustments is one of the biggest issues facing clients at Chapeltown Citizens Advice.**

Delays, refusals, and poor implementation are widespread.

Contributing factors include:

- Employers not understanding their legal duties or the purpose of adjustments.
- Stigma and fear of discrimination, which stop people disclosing health conditions to employers fully.
- Delays or refusals even after a request is made.
- Lack of clear internal policies or procedures within organisations/workplaces, making it difficult for people to know how to assert their rights.
- Cultural attitudes that view requests for adjustments as burdensome or disruptive, or more general lack of good and open work cultures.

Many clients were unsure of their rights or how to ask for support when they came for employment advice at Chapeltown Citizens Advice, especially when employers have no clear process in place. Too often, whether someone gets the adjustments they need depends on individual managers rather than consistent policy or accountability.

There are, however, clear examples of the difference reasonable adjustments can make. One client reported a significant improvement in both their employment experience and their overall health after the specialist employment adviser helped them to secure adjustments to their role.

Sheree's story

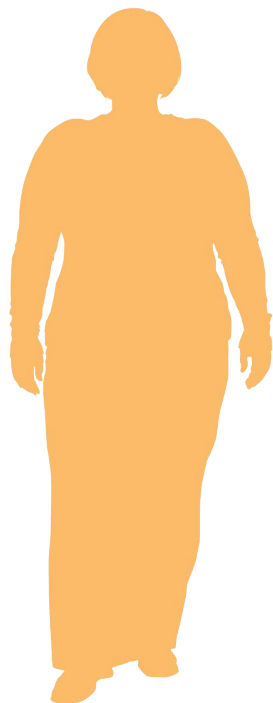


Sheree* is based in the Leeds area. She was aware that her long-term mental health condition qualified as a disability under the Equality Act, but she felt deeply stigmatised and vulnerable about disclosing it to her employer. Working in an environment where open communication about personal challenges felt limited, Sheree was hesitant to request the support she knew she needed. Concerned about potential judgment and the impact on her job security, she initially tried to manage her difficulties without involving her employer.

Seeking guidance, Sheree contacted Citizens Advice, where she learned about her right to reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act. Although she now understood her legal protections, she remained uneasy about initiating the conversation at work. To help bridge that gap, a formal adjustment request was prepared and submitted on her behalf.

The request outlined her condition, referenced the legal framework, and detailed the adjustments she needed to work effectively without disadvantage. This prompted a constructive conversation with her employer and, after a period of review and discussion, appropriate changes to her working conditions were agreed upon.

With the adjustments in place, Sheree felt more supported and at ease in her role, which made a huge difference to her mental health. Her experience shows how formal processes, as well as professional advice, can reduce barriers and ensure employees with disabilities receive the support they are entitled to.



Cases such as Sheree's show that when reasonable adjustments are implemented by employers or managers, they don't just support job retention, they act as a health intervention.

The failure to implement reasonable adjustments is not just a workplace issue - it is a driver of negative health outcomes. When individuals with health conditions are unsupported at work, their health is more likely to decline, they are more likely to lose employment, and they risk facing greater long-term exclusion from the labour market. The effects are especially severe in disadvantaged areas, where alternative employment options and support systems may be limited.

As the specialist employment service at Chapeltown Citizens Advice shows, creating equitable workplaces for disabled people is not just about knowing the law - it's about ensuring people can access, assert, and benefit from their rights in practice. In areas marked by poverty, limited job opportunities, and poorer health, the stakes are even higher.

The experience of Chapeltown shows that change is needed at both local and national levels. Employers must be held accountable for meeting their legal obligations, and clearer employment guidance and processes are needed to make adjustments routine, not exceptional. People need better access to local specialist employment advice and support, which is tailored to reflect the realities of health and disadvantage in local areas. And it is important that trade unions need to be represented in all jobs and sectors to ensure that everyone has access to protection of their rights at work.

Change is needed

Action is needed on multiple fronts. Employers must take equal responsibility alongside the state to create inclusive and supportive workplaces, where adjustments are seen as standard practice, not special treatment. That means better enforcement of legal obligations, clear and consistent processes within organisations, and a cultural shift away from viewing disabled workers as a problem to be managed.

At the same time, frontline services like Chapeltown Citizens Advice must be properly resourced to provide specialist, locally-informed support. Our research shows that, **local employment advisers can be the difference between someone staying in work with the right support or falling out of employment altogether.**

Better work could help to reduce health inequalities in somewhere like Chapeltown. But for it to do so, both the immediate barriers within workplaces and the wider systems that enable them must be tackled - because equitable employment isn't possible without both strong social security and accountable, informed employers.

Chapeltown's specialist employment adviser on the impact of reasonable adjustments:

"Putting adjustments in place that help the employee continue to do their work will have a significant impact, because they're able to do the work more effectively because the adjustment has been put in place."

Unlawful Deduction of Wages

Unlawful deduction of wages is one of the most common employment issues Chapeltown's specialist employment adviser encounters in their advice work, particularly among clients like Josh in low-paid, insecure jobs. The adviser emphasised that this problem is especially prevalent among racially minoritised workers, who can be more vulnerable to exploitation due to perceived vulnerabilities such as limited knowledge of their rights, language barriers, and fear of retaliation:

"One of the big areas that I notice with ethnic minorities is unlawful deductions from wages. Employers either delay payment or pay less than what's owed - often with flimsy excuses like financial difficulty. But the truth is, they know these workers are less likely to push back."

The specialist employment adviser observed that unlawful deduction of wages and delayed payments are not isolated incidents but part of a recurring pattern of mistreatment in precarious sectors, where employers knowingly take advantage of workers' hesitation to challenge unfair treatment.

The health consequences of these workplace issues are significant. Financial instability caused by underpayment leads to chronic stress, anxiety, and declining mental health, especially when individuals are already living on the edge of poverty. The fear of job loss or lack of alternative employment options can prevent workers from speaking out, trapping them in harmful situations that further erode their wellbeing. This cycle of exploitation and insecurity not only undermines financial stability but also contributes to poor health outcomes, particularly among already marginalised groups.



Josh's story

Josh* is employed full-time as a manual worker in logistics, in the Leeds area. He is a racially minoritised individual and is currently receiving Universal Credit to supplement his low income. Despite having a permanent employee contract, he experienced significant financial instability due to persistent underpayment of wages over several months.

Over the course of several months, Josh was repeatedly underpaid or not paid at all, receiving irregular, ad hoc payments of under £400 per month, well below his contractual entitlement. The employer attributed this to financial difficulties, offering no formal communication or resolution. Josh continued working under these conditions out of necessity, accepting that some money is better than none - an attitude shaped by fear of job loss and further economic hardship.

The financial instability caused severe stress and anxiety for him, compounding pre-existing health conditions. The wage issues left him struggling to pay for food, bills, and basic necessities. He experienced mental health problems, and expressed feelings of shame and stigma when seeking additional help for essentials like food and energy.

With the help of Citizens Advice, the employer agreed to repay thousands owed to him in installments; he was also referred to a food bank and issued an energy voucher to help with living costs.

*Names have been changed. Note that the case studies in this report draw upon individual experiences, with details altered to ensure anonymity, guided by the experience of other clients in similar circumstances

Poor Work Culture

Poor workplace culture is one of the most common challenges Chapeltown's specialist employment adviser supports clients with. This often includes bullying, lack of flexible working arrangements, and a culture where workers feel unable to raise concerns or assert their rights without fear of negative consequences. These issues can have a serious and lasting impact on individuals' health, confidence, and ability to stay in work.

Bullying

Bullying is one of the most harmful and common issues the service supports clients with, often continuing for months and leaving individuals afraid to speak up due to fear of job loss or lack of support. The specialist employment adviser regularly sees how bullying creates a domino effect - fueling stress that spills over into family life and turning mild anxiety into more serious mental health challenges.

In one example, a client working in the hospitality sector was persistently bullied by colleagues. The bullying left her feeling unsafe at work, severely anxious, unable to sleep, and struggling to focus on parenting. With the specialist employment adviser's support, she was able to formally raise a grievance. She was helped to document the bullying behaviors in detail and clearly set out how the employer had failed in their duty of care for her psychological wellbeing. The grievance was upheld, with the bullies receiving final warnings, and the client was able to return to a safer, improved working environment. Over time, she regained her confidence, her sleep improved, and she rediscovered enjoyment in her job.

As the specialist employment adviser reflected, ***"the bullying behavior infected her health and her ability to enjoy her job... slowly but surely she got back to enjoying her work again."*** Her experience reflects a wider pattern: bullying doesn't just harm someone's time at work - it can deeply affect their health, home life, and ability to carry on.

Inflexible working arrangements

Chapeltown's employment service frequently supports clients - particularly zero-hour, agency, and care sector workers - whose health is affected by inflexible and unpredictable working patterns. The lack of control over hours, limited support for childcare, and absence of wellbeing policies often lead to high stress, poor work-life balance, and worsened health conditions.

As the specialist employment adviser observed, if people ***"haven't been allowed flexible working... those conditions then have a negative impact on the client's wellbeing."*** Without flexibility, vulnerable workers face a cycle of uncertainty and strain that can seriously undermine both their physical and mental health.

Lack of transparency

The specialist employment adviser frequently supports clients - especially migrant workers, racially minoritised people, and low-paid employees - whose health is negatively affected by unclear and unsupportive workplace cultures. In environments where people fear raising concerns, lack clear communication channels, or feel uncertain about their rights, there seems to be a pattern of growing psychological strain.

As the adviser explains, ***"if they're working in an environment where there's not much transparency, or there's a culture of people not being able to express concerns openly, it has a knock-on effect."*** That knock-on effect often includes chronic stress, anxiety, and sleep disruption - but it can also worsen physical health. Clients with pre-existing conditions or disabilities may find it harder to access the adjustments or support they need, leading to deterioration in their overall health. The ongoing pressure of feeling voiceless and unsupported at work can damage both mental and physical wellbeing over time.

Why local employment advice services matter

The experience and insights of the specialist employment adviser at Chapeltown Citizens Advice highlights the vital need for specialist employment support in local communities, particularly in areas experiencing multiple forms of deprivation where people in insecure and low-paid work often lack the knowledge and confidence to enforce their rights.

Empowers clients to know their rights

Specialist employment advisers play a vital role in empowering individuals to understand and assert their workplace rights. By explaining complex employment law in clear, accessible language, she helps clients navigate workplace challenges - from understanding employment contracts and pay entitlements to handling disputes, grievances, and potential tribunal claims. Advice services such as these are especially important for vulnerable workers who may face significant knowledge gaps or barriers to accessing support. Practical guidance and tailored information can help to build the confidence people need to challenge unfair treatment, protect their rights, and make informed decisions about their working lives.

Provides practical employment support

Practical and targeted employment advice is essential for supporting vulnerable workers who may face language barriers, low pay, or insecure contracts. The specialist employment service provides a vital voice for those who feel intimidated or powerless in the workplace, offering hands-on help such as drafting grievances, preparing reasonable adjustment requests, and negotiating directly with employers. By breaking down complex processes into clear, understandable steps, clients can better articulate their concerns and assert their rights - especially in situations where power imbalances leave them at risk of exploitation or job loss.

"Clients actually need specialist advice, specialist support and guidance... someone to represent them, someone who can ensure, ultimately, that they know what their employment rights are and to be treated fairly at work."

"I either assist them or act on their behalf, or empower them so that they have the right information, so that they can move forward."

"Some clients don't have the confidence or knowledge to understand what their rights are... I assist them, or, if they're capable of doing things on their own, I make sure I provide them with the correct information so that they can do things effectively on their own."

Why local employment advice services matter



Alleviates negative health impacts

The specialist employment adviser has seen first-hand how employment advice can directly improve people's health. They support clients with health conditions by helping them draft reasonable adjustment requests and, where needed, contacts employers directly to explain their legal duties under the Equality Act - ensuring that adjustments are properly considered. They also helps negotiate flexible working arrangements and connects clients to occupational health services. By addressing workplace conflicts, bullying, and wage issues, people are given the tools and confidence to feel more secure at work. This kind of targeted support reduces stress, prevents workplace issues from escalating, and plays a crucial role in protecting both mental and physical wellbeing.

"When clients come back and say they can sleep better at night... they can enjoy their work again... that's huge. That helps them move forward."

"Some people also struggle financially, so we help them access food banks, provide food vouchers, and support with gas and electricity bills."

Gateway to additional advice and local support

Employment advice goes far beyond workplace issues - advisers can provide holistic support that addresses the wider impacts of insecure, low-paid work. Many clients come to them with employment problems that are deeply tied to financial instability and mental health struggles. Alongside resolving job-related issues, Chapeltown's specialist employment adviser connects clients to crisis support like foodbank and energy vouchers, helping to ease immediate financial pressures. By offering a safe space, reducing stress, and linking people to wider services, their work supports not just employment outcomes but also clients' overall wellbeing.

Addressing the link between work and health

Secure, supportive and fair work can be a powerful driver of good health - but for too many people, that ideal remains out of reach. Our research, grounded in insights from a frontline employment adviser at Chapeltown Citizens Advice, highlights how harmful working conditions - including lack of reasonable adjustments, unlawful wage deductions, and other poor working conditions - are common in low-paid, precarious jobs with little trade union protection.

These issues are not isolated; they are compounded in disadvantaged communities where job options are limited, and racially minoritised people are overrepresented in insecure roles. In places like Chapeltown, poor work conditions do more than harm individual wellbeing - they can deepen existing health inequalities, contributing to chronic stress, economic instability, and long-term physical and mental health issues. This shows that geography matters. Where you live can shape the types of work you can access, the protections you're afforded and ultimately your health outcomes.

This local, frontline research forms part of our broader research on economic activity, which you can find in our [main report](#). The main report explores the complex relationship between work and health, drawing on additional lived experiences of the people Citizens Advice supports. It shows how difficult working conditions and inadequate support for health and disability create a vicious cycle where poor work harms health, and poor health becomes a barrier to work. By bringing a geographical lens to these findings, this report highlights how **structural inequalities intersect and compound, reinforcing unequal health outcomes** across regions. It also underscores the vital role of local advice services in helping people, especially in underrepresented areas, navigate workplace issues - and the positive impact this support can have on improving health outcomes.

The recommended actions in our main report on economic activity and health inequalities include:

- **Protect disadvantaged workers with a well-resourced Fair Work Agency able to proactively address labour issues that lead to poor health outcomes.**
- **The government should support employers and model best practice when it comes to providing reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities and long-term health conditions.**
- **An increase in the rate of statutory sick pay, to ensure that fewer people face poverty when they fall ill.**
- **People should be able to access quality assured employment support and advice, either from work coaches or other providers, tailored to reflect people's individual circumstances and the places they live.**
- **Fully withdraw proposals for disability benefit cuts; we welcome the decisions to review changes to Personal Independence Payment, and believe that change to the Universal Credit health element should also be paused to allow their impact on employment and living standards for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to be properly assessed.**

We believe action in these areas would help to improve the relationship between health and work, and in doing so reduce health inequalities.

Citizens Advice helps people find a way forward.

We provide free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. We're a voice for our clients and consumers on the issues that matter to them.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.

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