**Reasons to be cheerful – launching a Midlands Good Work Charter**

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In launching its Good Work Charter, the Midlands is riding the crest of a wave. Across the UK, Good Work, or variants of it, are being encouraged as a tool to support business competitiveness, promote inclusive regional economies and reduce social inequalities.

There are therefore two very good reasons to champion the West Midland’s Good Work Charter. First, because it’s the right thing to do. All jobs should provide the material, social, physical and mental wellbeing of workers. Second, because it’s good for business. The evidence shows that better jobs raise productivity and innovation and help staff recruitment and retention.

Good Work is an expression of job quality. Other terms include Fair Work and Decent Work. Across the UK, there are initiatives to promote better job quality, whatever the local expression. Both the Scottish and Wales Governments have pledged to become ‘fair work nations’. In Scotland, fair work is regarded as key to increasing competitiveness and promoting inclusion by encouraging business to work in different and better ways. In Wales a key driver has been the desire to halt the growth in low paid, low skilled and insecure jobs. Northern Ireland also wants ‘good jobs for all’ and have new model of productive working relationships in firms that supports the creation of an innovative and inclusive economy. All share a belief that improving job quality is good for businesses, workers and their communities.

In the English regions, employment charters have been launched in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Sheffield, Greater London Authority and North of Tyne. Other areas are planning charters. The drivers can be varied: concerns about productivity gaps, absence and sickness rates, rising in-work poverty and insecure work or more simply a desire to create modern economies with fulfilling work. These Charters are typically developed in consultation with local employers, trade unions and community organisations and in some cases have been business-led. They champion best employment practice and the creation of good jobs.

Importantly, good jobs represent good business. A growing body of research finds positive links between job quality and innovation, productivity and employee retention. Product innovation is higher amongst firms with better job quality for example. Productivity too is higher in sectors with decent job quality. In both cases employees having voice and representation can make the difference. A positive link exists between employee engagement and individual and organisational performance.

Moreover the myth has been busted that a choice has to be made between job creation and job quality. Having more and better jobs is possible. Employment numbers decline in less productive firms, while firms that are more productive create additional jobs. And innovative firms in more innovative countries have higher employment growth, and their employment tends to be of higher quality.

The benefits of good jobs are also evident in tight labour markets, with firms offering good job quality better able to attract and retain workers. It shows that whilst pay is important, workers also value other aspects of their jobs. For example, individuals who find their work engaging are less likely to quit.

The Midlands already has businesses that offer good jobs but more needs to be achieved. Good jobs need to be the standard for all businesses in the region if boost to productivity and innovation are to be made and inclusive growth achieved. So it is right that the Midlands now has a Good Work Charter to help its businesses and communities thrive.

The Midland’s Good Work Charter draws on what works. It can’t address all of the Midland’s economic and social challenges, but it is another and important tool in the toolbox for our Combined and Local Authorities and LEPs to help make the region a more attractive place to work and live. It is employers, however, who provide jobs and adoption of the Charter will bring significant benefits to individual businesses. It offers employers a set of feasible employment practices that they can implement. These practices will help Midlands’ businesses establish the region as a great place to live and work.