

The Growth Company
Corporate Plan Highlights 23-26

Celebrating three years of delivery, growth and transformation

The Growth Company

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FOREWORD

Over the last three years, the Growth Company has shown what inclusive and sustainable growth means in practice.

Against a backdrop of uncertainty, change and rising demand, we made strong progress against our vision, purpose and ambition - helping people, businesses and places to thrive.

We helped 118,142 businesses implement improvements, supported 9,418 individuals and businesses to accelerate climate action, created, safeguarded or filled 80,196 employment opportunities, and enabled 131,247 people to make positive progress.

This impact has been underpinned by a clear commitment to excellent customer service, with GC's annual Net Promoter Score increasing from 61 to 79. It has also been powered by our colleagues, reflected in consistently high engagement scores and Investors in People Gold.

Together, these achievements reflect the dedication of our people, the strength of our partnerships and the value of GC's role in driving economic, social and environmental impact across Greater Manchester and beyond, setting the benchmark for good growth across the UK.

As we look ahead to the 2026–2029 Corporate Plan, we do so from a position of strength — with a clear purpose, stronger evidence of impact and a goal to go further in the years ahead.





Mike Blackburn,
Chair, The Growth Company

118,142
businesses implementing improvements
ENABLE GROWTH

80,196
employment opportunities created, safeguarded or filled
CREATE JOBS

131,247
individuals positively progressed
IMPROVE LIVES

OUR DELIVERY STORY

Over the past three years, we have helped people, businesses and places to thrive - unlocking potential, creating opportunity and delivering lasting economic and social value across Greater Manchester and beyond.

YEAR 1

Transitioned and transformed

Seamless delivery through funding transition
ERDF to UKSPF, Business Rates retention and Integrated Settlement.

Built foundations for inclusion, net zero and future resilience
Strengthened green capability and credentials, and embedded sustainability and inclusion targets.

Scaled nationally
National rollout of Made Smarter confirmed and expanded into new sectors.

YEAR 2

Strengthened impact, influence and innovation

Enhanced business support and impact
Strengthened business support services, innovation and international trade activity.

Expanded reach and maintained excellence
Grew employment offer to include health and justice, and extended services into new regions while sustaining top-quartile performance.

Embedded digital, data and AI
Use of AI through business support chatbot, Copilot, Magic Notes and launch of Colleague Hub.

YEAR 3

Positioned for the future

Leading growth, inward investment and business support
Launched Invest Manchester, secured major international events, and profiled GM as a great place to do business.

Expanded commercial reach
Consolidation and growth of GC Insight and scaled certification and accreditation services.

Reinforced quality of services
Excellent customer satisfaction with NPS of 79. Attained Ofsted ‘expected standards’ and boosted apprenticeship achievement rates.

OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Enable growth

£157m
loans, investments or grant funding secured by businesses

£2.2bn
GVA growth

188
inward investment projects secured

£291m
economic impact from campaigns & conferences

118,142
businesses implementing improvements

171,230
business engagements

Create jobs

80,196
employment opportunities created, safeguarded or filled

32,000
new business start ups

45,384
unique Employ GM users

2,480
apprenticeship starts

1,673
apprenticeship successes

Improve lives

59,394
GM Our Pass users

1,228
GM Good Employment Charter members/ supporters

24,539
clients placed into work

4,711
NEET young people trained/ supported

74,189
interventions for offenders

131,247
individuals positively progressed

PROMOTING PLACE

We advanced Greater Manchester's profile as a globally connected city-region, attracting investment, securing world-class events and creating international opportunities for businesses to trade and grow. Our coordinated approach to investment promotion, trade missions and strategic partnerships enhanced the city-region's global reputation, supported priority growth sectors and delivered lasting economic impact.

Key achievements

- Launch of the Greater Manchester Strategy for the Visitor Economy 2025-2030.
- First UK city-region to establish an Accommodation Business Improvement District.
- Launched Invest Manchester brand at MIPIM, sharpening GM's global investment proposition and aligning activity to priority sectors and growth ambitions.
- Series of successful trade missions aligned to GM's strategic growth opportunities including China, India, Japan and the USA.
- Greater Manchester International Trade Pilot launched in collaboration with the Department for Business and Trade and the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

13,238
jobs created or safeguarded

188
inward investment projects

£291m
economic impact through events

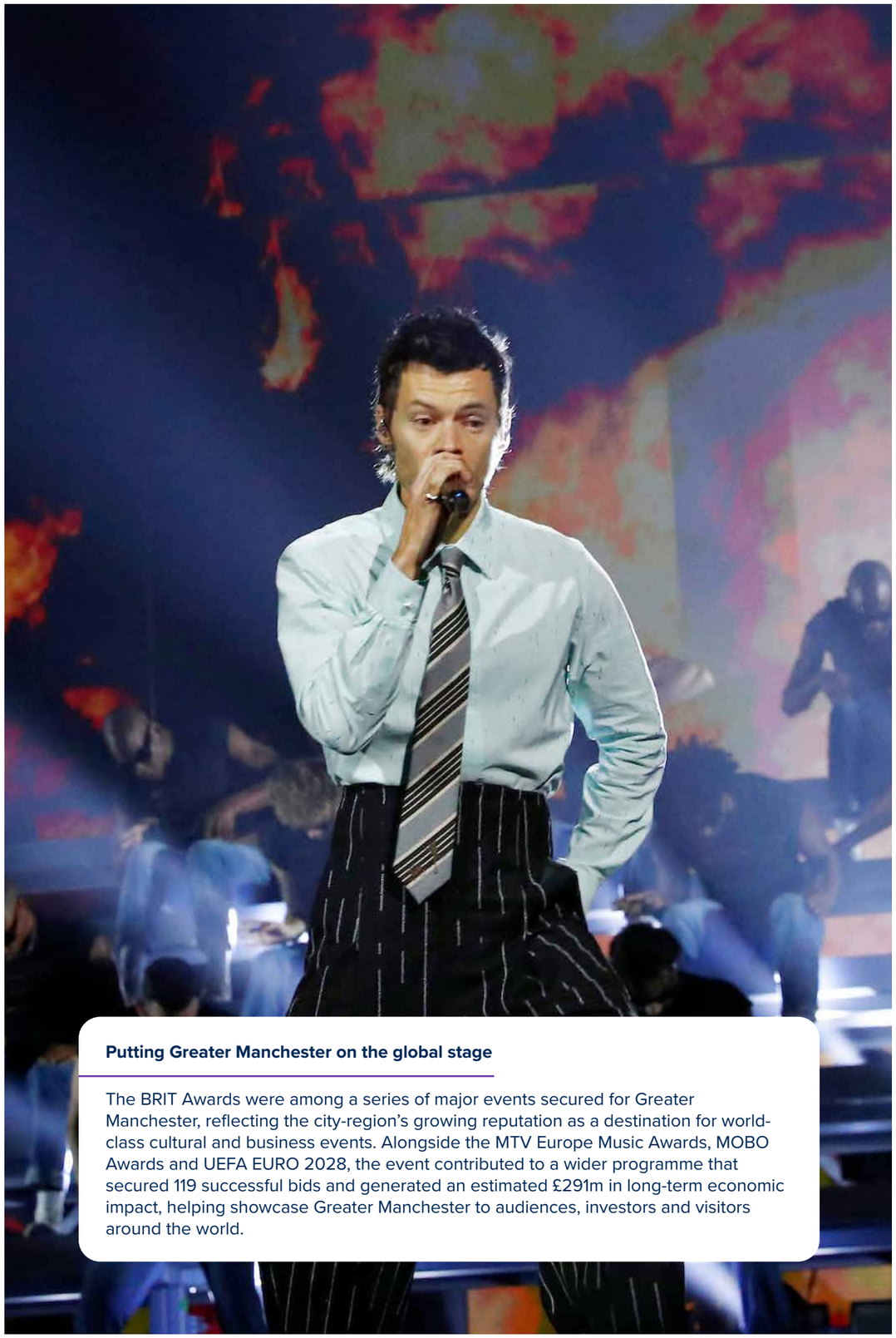


Greater Manchester as a leading investment destination

Major platforms such as UKREiiF and MIPIM enabled us to showcase the city-region's priority sectors, regeneration opportunities and long-term growth ambitions to investors from around the world.

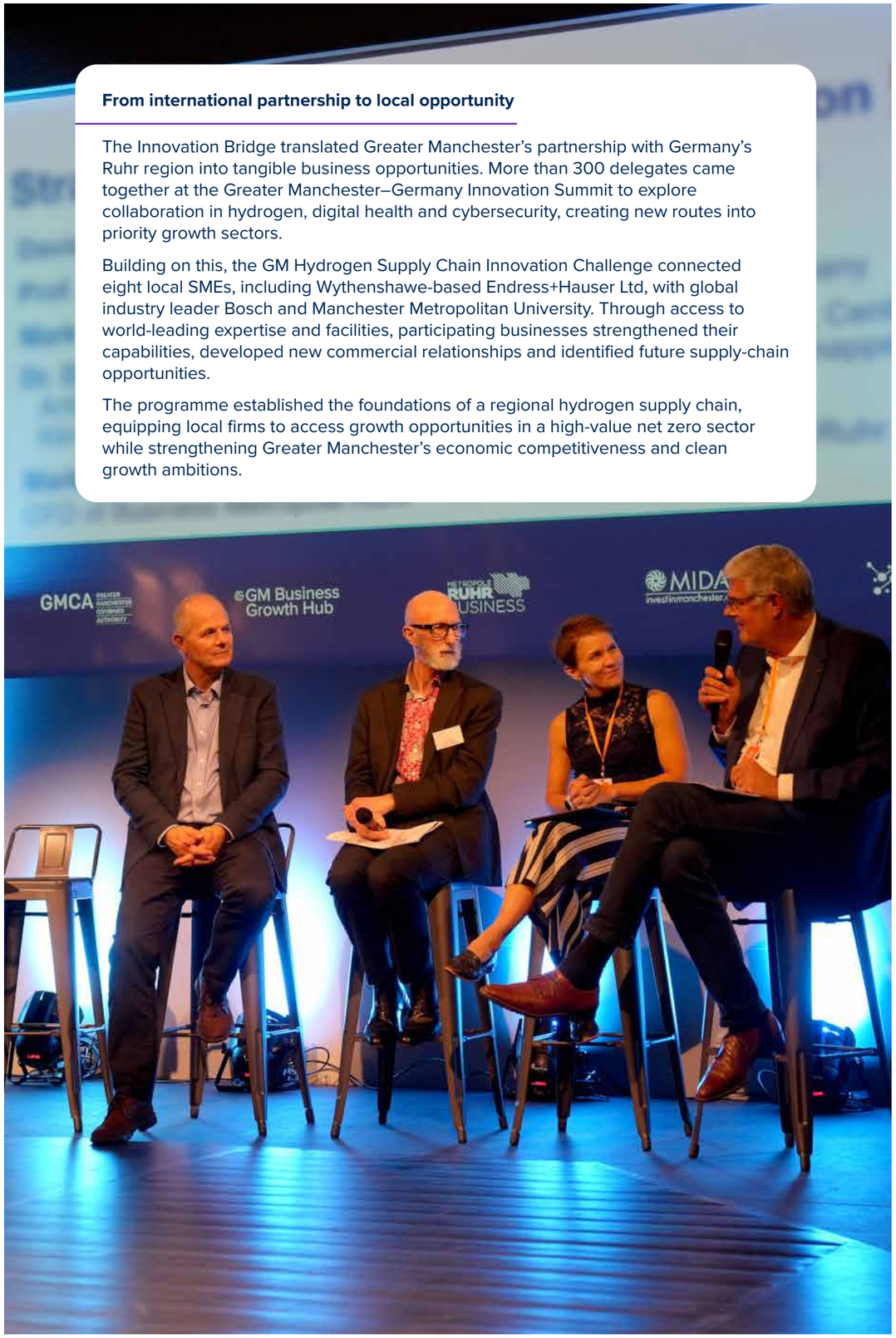
These efforts helped secure 188 inward investment projects, creating 10,339 jobs and safeguarding 2,899 more, reinforcing Greater Manchester's position as the UK's leading foreign direct investment destination outside London.

Success has not only been measured by attracting new investment, but by helping existing investors expand and deepen their commitment to the city-region. For example, BNY continued to grow its Manchester presence, expanding to around 2,000 employees and reaffirming its long-term investment in the region, recognising Greater Manchester's talent, connectivity and innovation strengths.



Putting Greater Manchester on the global stage

The BRIT Awards were among a series of major events secured for Greater Manchester, reflecting the city-region's growing reputation as a destination for world-class cultural and business events. Alongside the MTV Europe Music Awards, MOBO Awards and UEFA EURO 2028, the event contributed to a wider programme that secured 119 successful bids and generated an estimated £291m in long-term economic impact, helping showcase Greater Manchester to audiences, investors and visitors around the world.



From international partnership to local opportunity

The Innovation Bridge translated Greater Manchester's partnership with Germany's Ruhr region into tangible business opportunities. More than 300 delegates came together at the Greater Manchester–Germany Innovation Summit to explore collaboration in hydrogen, digital health and cybersecurity, creating new routes into priority growth sectors.

Building on this, the GM Hydrogen Supply Chain Innovation Challenge connected eight local SMEs, including Wythenshawe-based Endress+Hauser Ltd, with global industry leader Bosch and Manchester Metropolitan University. Through access to world-leading expertise and facilities, participating businesses strengthened their capabilities, developed new commercial relationships and identified future supply-chain opportunities.

The programme established the foundations of a regional hydrogen supply chain, equipping local firms to access growth opportunities in a high-value net zero sector while strengthening Greater Manchester's economic competitiveness and clean growth ambitions.

HELPING BUSINESSES SUCCEED

We extended our reach and impact to support businesses at every stage of their growth journey. Despite significant changes in funding arrangements, we maintained a high-performing business support offer across Greater Manchester, expanded nationally recognised programmes, increased access to finance for underrepresented founders, and grew our commercial and insight services. Targeted campaigns, partnership working and specialist expertise helped more businesses innovate, invest, develop talent and unlock opportunities for growth.

Key achievements

- Launched the UK's first AI-powered business support chatbot, helping more than **2,500** users access instant support through nearly **3,000** conversations.
- Sustained a high-performing business support service for Greater Manchester through multiple funding transitions, maintaining high customer satisfaction and strong results across all ten local authorities.
- Expanded innovation support across GM, connecting businesses with funding, research expertise and new technologies to drive growth and productivity.
- Supported **1,353** businesses to innovate, facilitating **453** collaborative R&D projects and enabling 160 companies to receive innovation grant funding of **£3.6m**.

118,142
businesses implemented improvements

£157m
loans, investment and grant funding secured by businesses

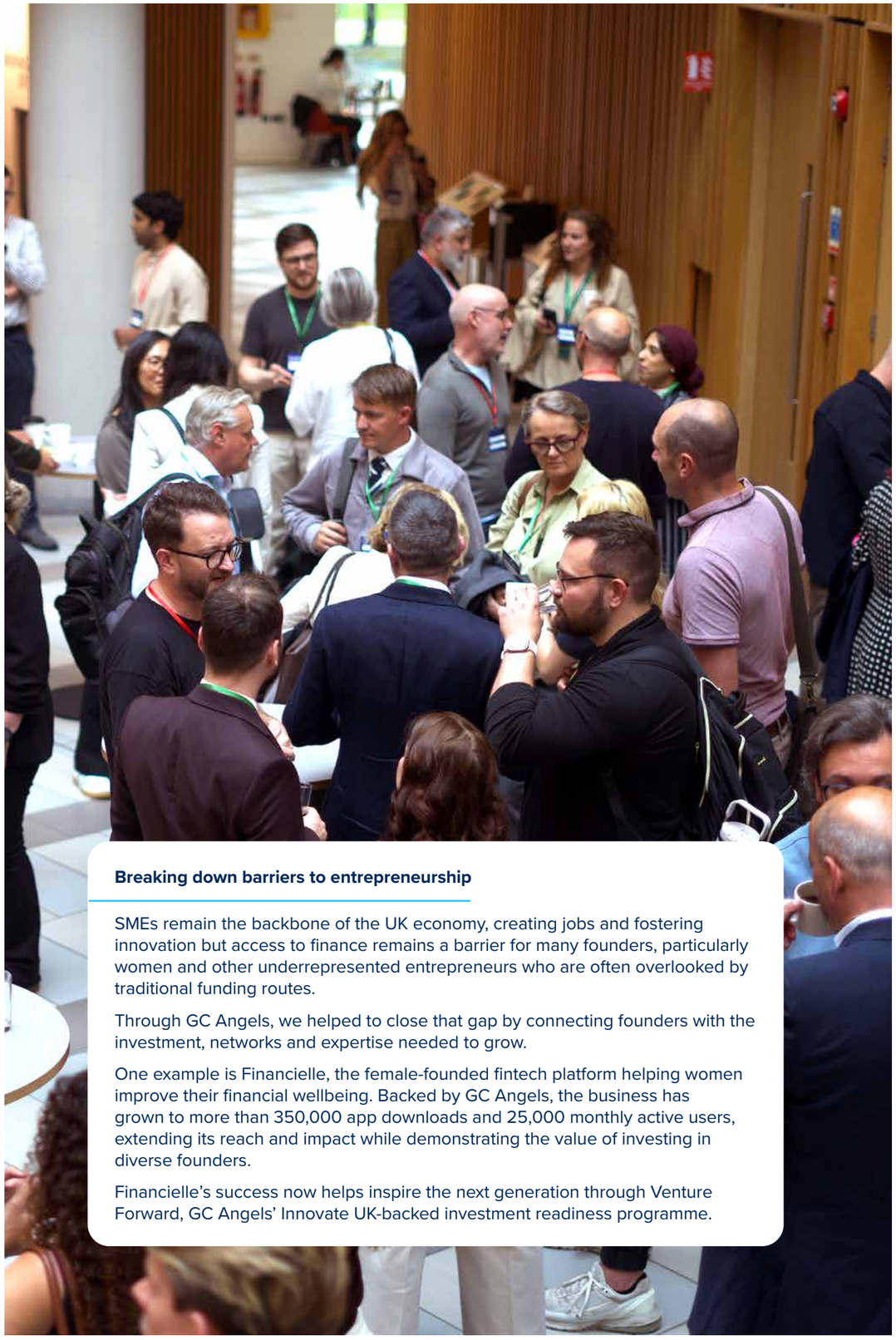
32,000
new business start-ups



Building connections that drive growth

By bringing together businesses, partners and stakeholders around shared priorities, we have helped employers access support, build capability and prepare for future growth. Our Greater Manchester-wide T Levels campaign is a clear example. Working with partners, colleges and business networks we secured more than 700 industry placements from over 200 employers, helping businesses access future talent and giving young people valuable industry experience and pathways into quality careers.

Former GM Mayor Andy Burnham meeting T Level students in January 2026.



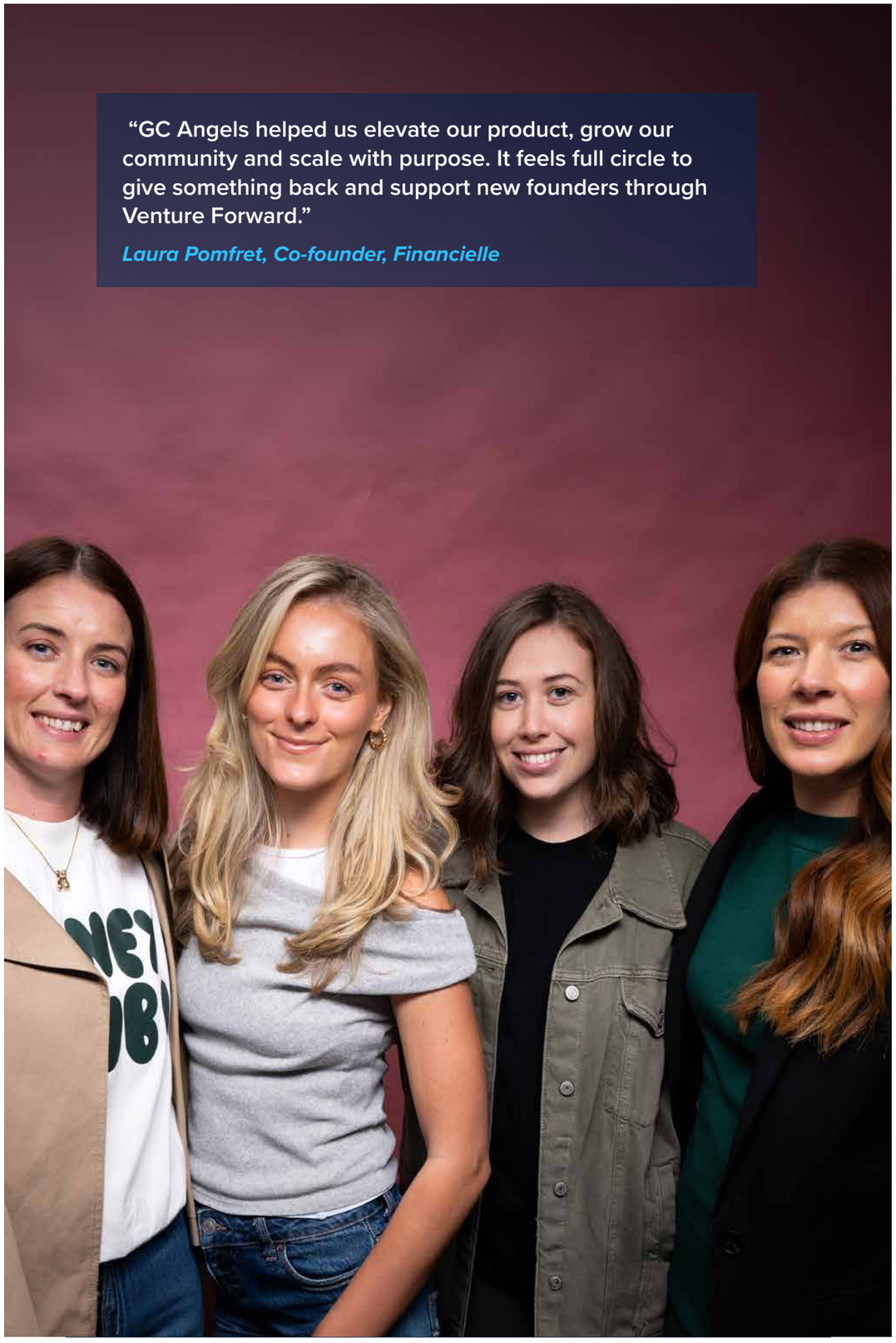
Breaking down barriers to entrepreneurship

SMEs remain the backbone of the UK economy, creating jobs and fostering innovation but access to finance remains a barrier for many founders, particularly women and other underrepresented entrepreneurs who are often overlooked by traditional funding routes.

Through GC Angels, we helped to close that gap by connecting founders with the investment, networks and expertise needed to grow.

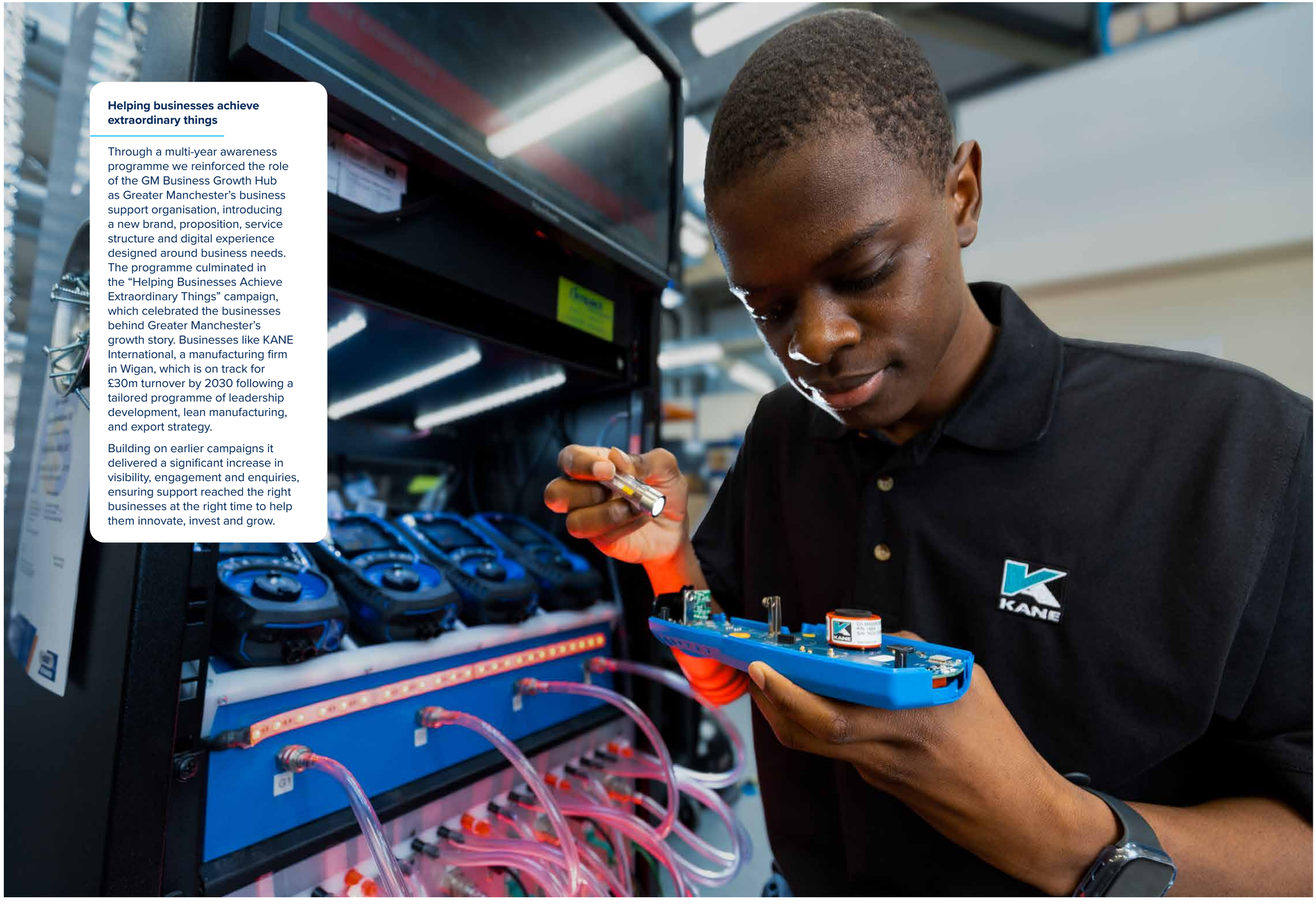
One example is Financielle, the female-founded fintech platform helping women improve their financial wellbeing. Backed by GC Angels, the business has grown to more than 350,000 app downloads and 25,000 monthly active users, extending its reach and impact while demonstrating the value of investing in diverse founders.

Financielle's success now helps inspire the next generation through Venture Forward, GC Angels' Innovate UK-backed investment readiness programme.



"GC Angels helped us elevate our product, grow our community and scale with purpose. It feels full circle to give something back and support new founders through Venture Forward."

Laura Pomfret, Co-founder, Financielle



Helping businesses achieve extraordinary things

Through a multi-year awareness programme we reinforced the role of the GM Business Growth Hub as Greater Manchester's business support organisation, introducing a new brand, proposition, service structure and digital experience designed around business needs. The programme culminated in the "Helping Businesses Achieve Extraordinary Things" campaign, which celebrated the businesses behind Greater Manchester's growth story. Businesses like KANE International, a manufacturing firm in Wigan, which is on track for £30m turnover by 2030 following a tailored programme of leadership development, lean manufacturing, and export strategy.

Building on earlier campaigns it delivered a significant increase in visibility, engagement and enquiries, ensuring support reached the right businesses at the right time to help them innovate, invest and grow.



> "The GM Business Growth Hub's been instrumental in how we've been able to internationalise our business and push our brand into new markets."
>
> ***Tom Fletcher, Managing Director, Firstplay Dietary Foods***

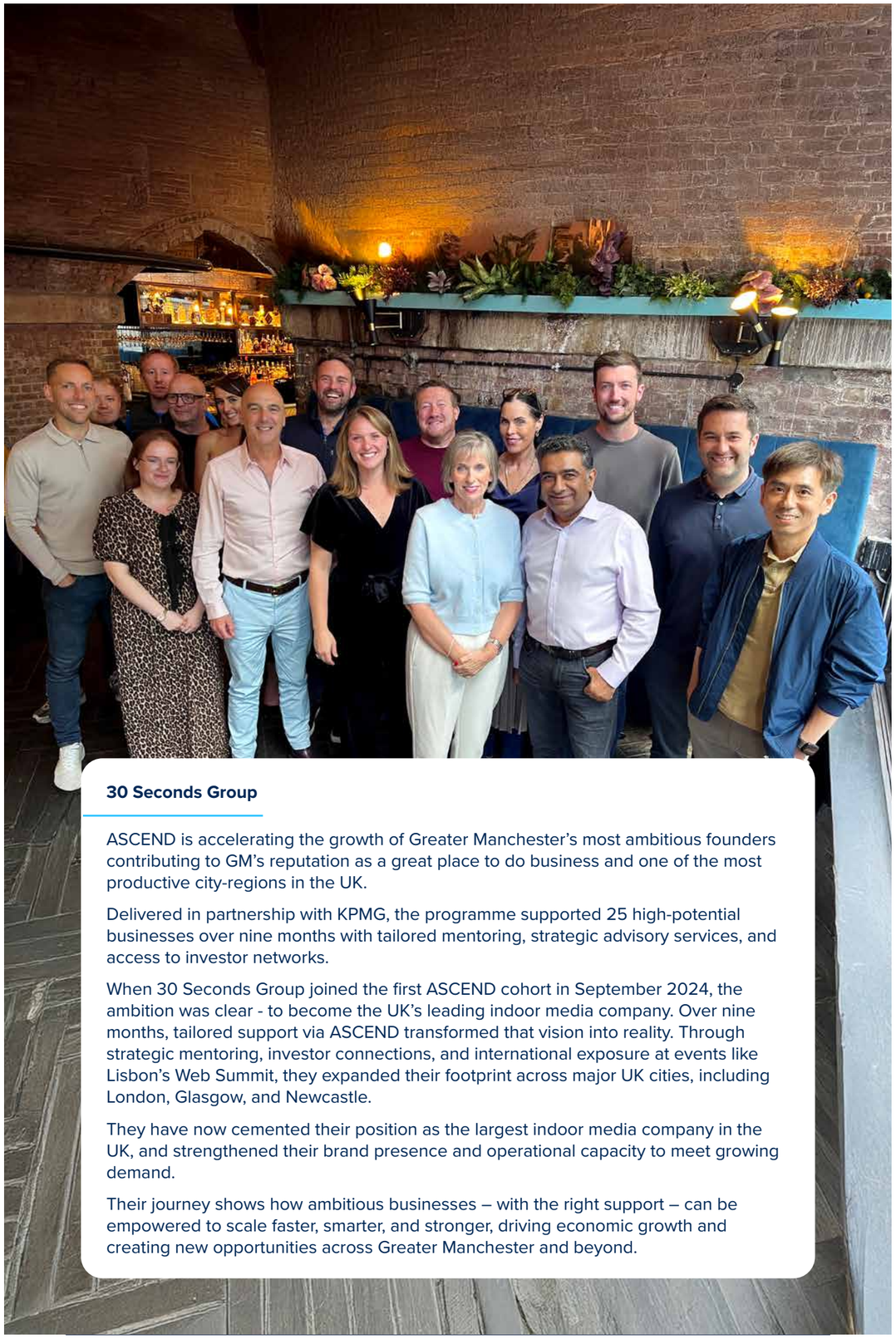
Firstplay Dietary Foods

Stockport-based manufacturer Firstplay Dietary Foods demonstrates how joined-up business support can drive growth and impact.

Since relocating to new premises in 2020, Firstplay has worked with the Growth Company to sharpen operations, invest in talent, and double revenue to £1.75m.

To meet global demand for its low-protein products, the business adopted automation with support from GM Business Growth Hub and Made Smarter, boosting capacity tenfold, reducing waste, and redeploying staff into higher-value roles.

Investment in people continued through leadership training, mentoring, and tailored apprenticeships, bringing fresh talent into finance and embedding a culture of continuous improvement. Most recently, international trade advice and funding have opened overseas markets, with US sales up sevenfold.



30 Seconds Group

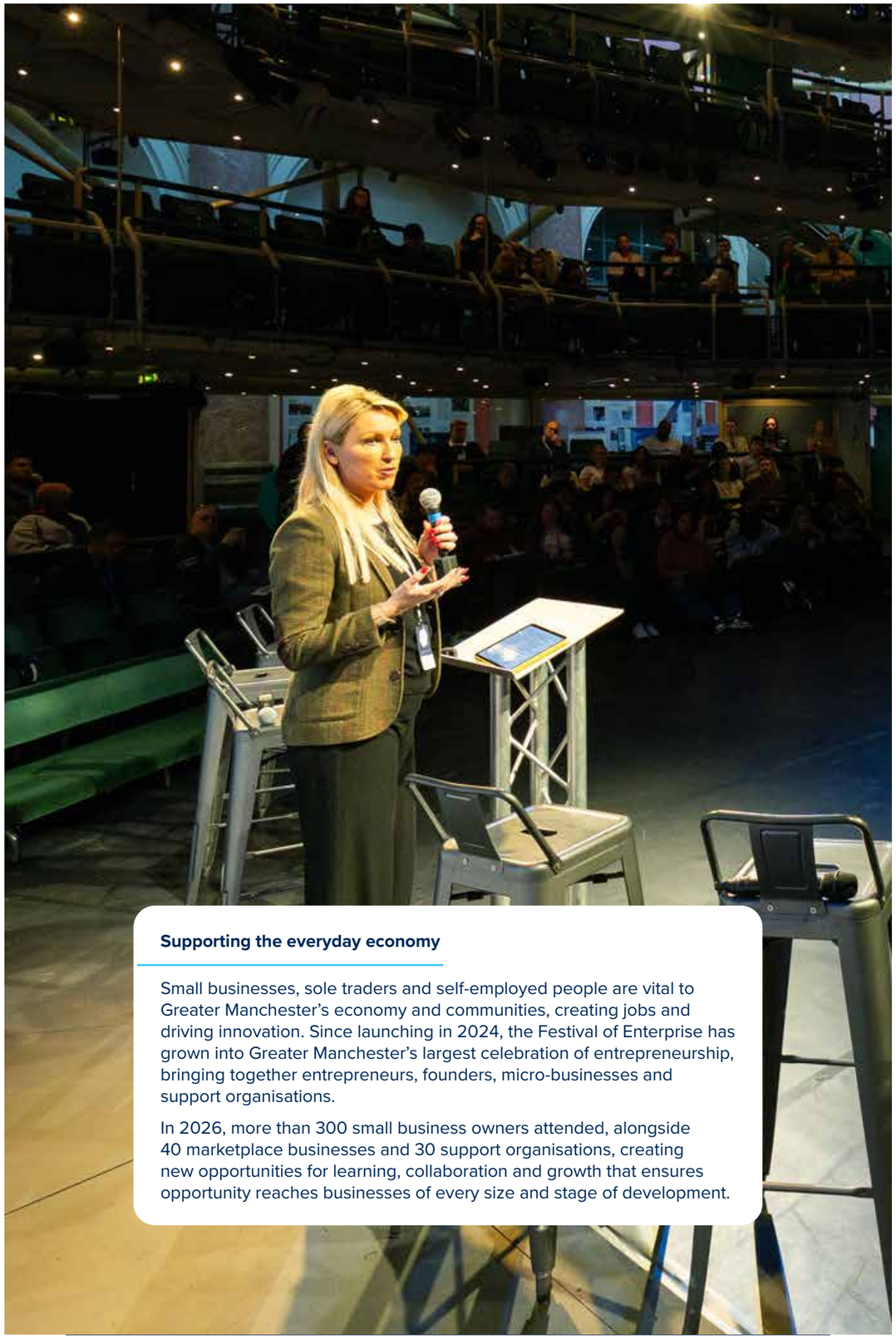
ASCEND is accelerating the growth of Greater Manchester's most ambitious founders contributing to GM's reputation as a great place to do business and one of the most productive city-regions in the UK.

Delivered in partnership with KPMG, the programme supported 25 high-potential businesses over nine months with tailored mentoring, strategic advisory services, and access to investor networks.

When 30 Seconds Group joined the first ASCEND cohort in September 2024, the ambition was clear - to become the UK's leading indoor media company. Over nine months, tailored support via ASCEND transformed that vision into reality. Through strategic mentoring, investor connections, and international exposure at events like Lisbon's Web Summit, they expanded their footprint across major UK cities, including London, Glasgow, and Newcastle.

They have now cemented their position as the largest indoor media company in the UK, and strengthened their brand presence and operational capacity to meet growing demand.

Their journey shows how ambitious businesses – with the right support – can be empowered to scale faster, smarter, and stronger, driving economic growth and creating new opportunities across Greater Manchester and beyond.



Supporting the everyday economy

Small businesses, sole traders and self-employed people are vital to Greater Manchester's economy and communities, creating jobs and driving innovation. Since launching in 2024, the Festival of Enterprise has grown into Greater Manchester's largest celebration of entrepreneurship, bringing together entrepreneurs, founders, micro-businesses and support organisations.

In 2026, more than 300 small business owners attended, alongside 40 marketplace businesses and 30 support organisations, creating new opportunities for learning, collaboration and growth that ensures opportunity reaches businesses of every size and stage of development.

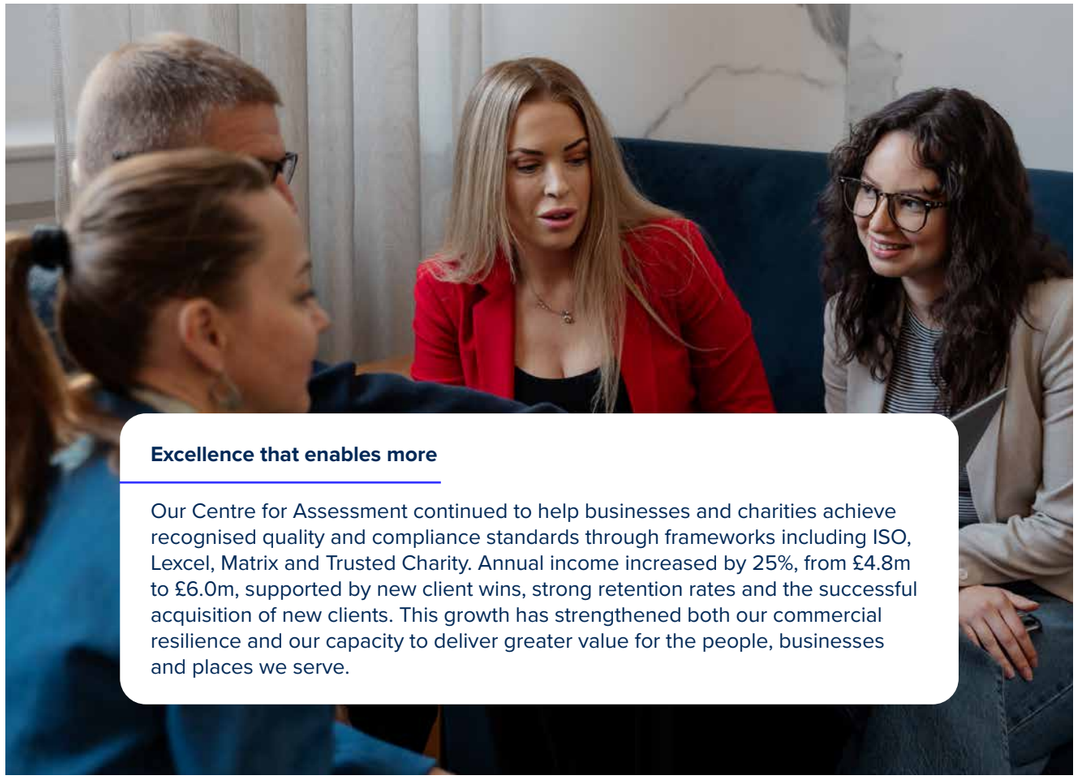
"As a relatively new business, the Festival of Enterprise helped me to gain insights, confidence and loads of connections."

Hannah Louise, Stitches



EXTENDING OUR IMPACT IN GM AND BEYOND

While our roots remain firmly in Greater Manchester, we expanded our national reach and commercial capability in ways that have strengthened our impact as a social enterprise. By developing innovative products and widening our client base, we have built greater financial resilience, maximising our capacity to deliver value and impact in Greater Manchester while extending our contribution to communities, businesses and places across the UK.



Excellence that enables more

Our Centre for Assessment continued to help businesses and charities achieve recognised quality and compliance standards through frameworks including ISO, Lexcel, Matrix and Trusted Charity. Annual income increased by 25%, from £4.8m to £6.0m, supported by new client wins, strong retention rates and the successful acquisition of new clients. This growth has strengthened both our commercial resilience and our capacity to deliver greater value for the people, businesses and places we serve.



Creating opportunity through green growth

The Growing the Green Economy in West Yorkshire programme, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by Green Economy, helped strengthen one of the region's fastest-growing sectors while supporting progress towards net zero.

Through tailored business support, sector mapping, training and strengthening local supply chains, the programme supported 231 businesses, created or safeguarded 109 jobs and generated £2.2m in increased sales. A local sector mapping report identified the green economy was worth £8.1bn and forecast to grow to £11.1bn by 2026, with significant opportunities in retrofit.

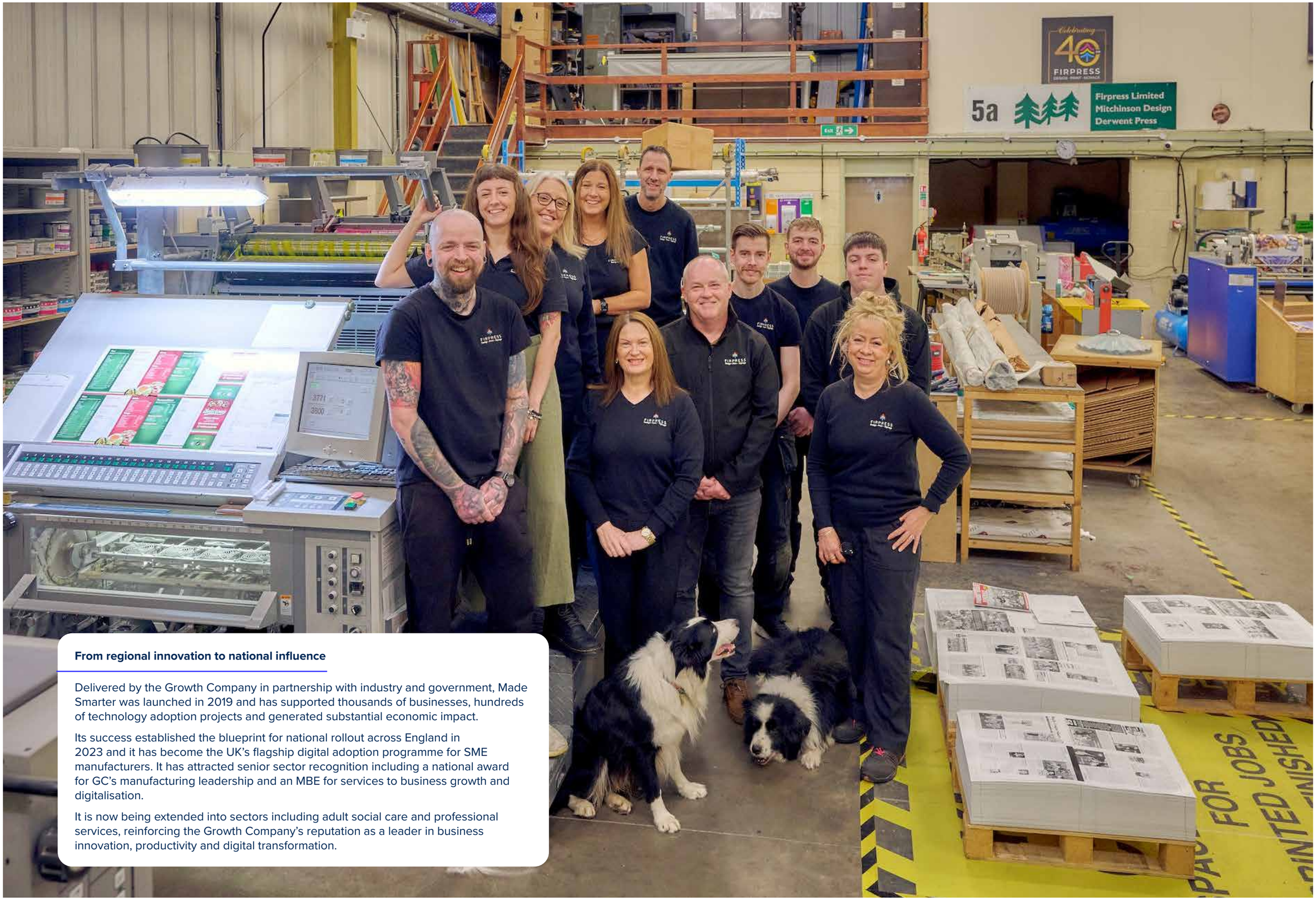
Targeted accelerator programmes supported 58 new entrants into the solar and ventilation sectors, while supply chain development and business networks strengthened collaboration, investment and growth across the region.



Shaping policy, places and investment

GC Insight brought together Winning Moves, ekosgen and GC consultancy services into a single national brand, gaining growing recognition as a provider of high-quality consultancy, research, evaluation and insight services. As GC Insight evolved, it expanded its reach across local and national government, helping organisations make better-informed decisions, secure investment and maximise impact.

It successfully launched Growth Flag to identify growth potential, target investment and inform decision-making. It is now delivering more than 300 projects annually for over 160 clients, including 50 local authorities, eight combined authorities and seven government departments.



From regional innovation to national influence

Delivered by the Growth Company in partnership with industry and government, Made Smarter was launched in 2019 and has supported thousands of businesses, hundreds of technology adoption projects and generated substantial economic impact.

Its success established the blueprint for national rollout across England in 2023 and it has become the UK's flagship digital adoption programme for SME manufacturers. It has attracted senior sector recognition including a national award for GC's manufacturing leadership and an MBE for services to business growth and digitalisation.

It is now being extended into sectors including adult social care and professional services, reinforcing the Growth Company's reputation as a leader in business innovation, productivity and digital transformation.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE

Growth feels real when people have the skills, confidence and opportunities to succeed, and when communities and economies thrive. Across our employment, skills, health, justice and youth programmes we delivered lasting impact by helping thousands of people progress in learning, work and life, while expanding our reach and strengthening the quality of our services.

Key achievements

- Won and mobilised major new contracts, including Connect to Work Staffordshire and Stoke and the UK's first national Jobs for Hongkongers contract.
- Sustained top-quartile performance and strong outcomes.
- Achieved Ofsted "expected standards" in 9 of 11 areas under the new framework and remained the largest deliverer of 16–19 provision outside the college network in Greater Manchester.
- Met or exceeded targets for adult skills achieving a **90% achievement rate** at the end of 2025/26.

131,247
individuals postively progressed

4,711
NEET young people trained/ supported

74,189
interventions for offenders

2,480
apprenticeship starts

The power of apprenticeships

We increased apprenticeship achievement rates from 50% to 62% over the period and demonstrated the life-changing impact of high-quality vocational training. Learners such as Max Fleming, who overcame significant educational challenges to become an award-recognised carpentry and joinery apprentice, and Karina Harney, who retrained after a career break and went on to win Level 2 Apprentice of the Year.



Karina's Story

After stepping away from work to care for her son, Karina Harney visited the Greater Manchester SkillCentre to explore opportunities for him and discovered a new path for herself. In 2023, aged 47, she started her construction apprenticeship and was named Level 2 Apprentice of the Year in 2025. Today, she is inspiring more women and career changers to pursue careers in construction, showing that apprenticeships can create opportunities at any stage of life.

Max's Story

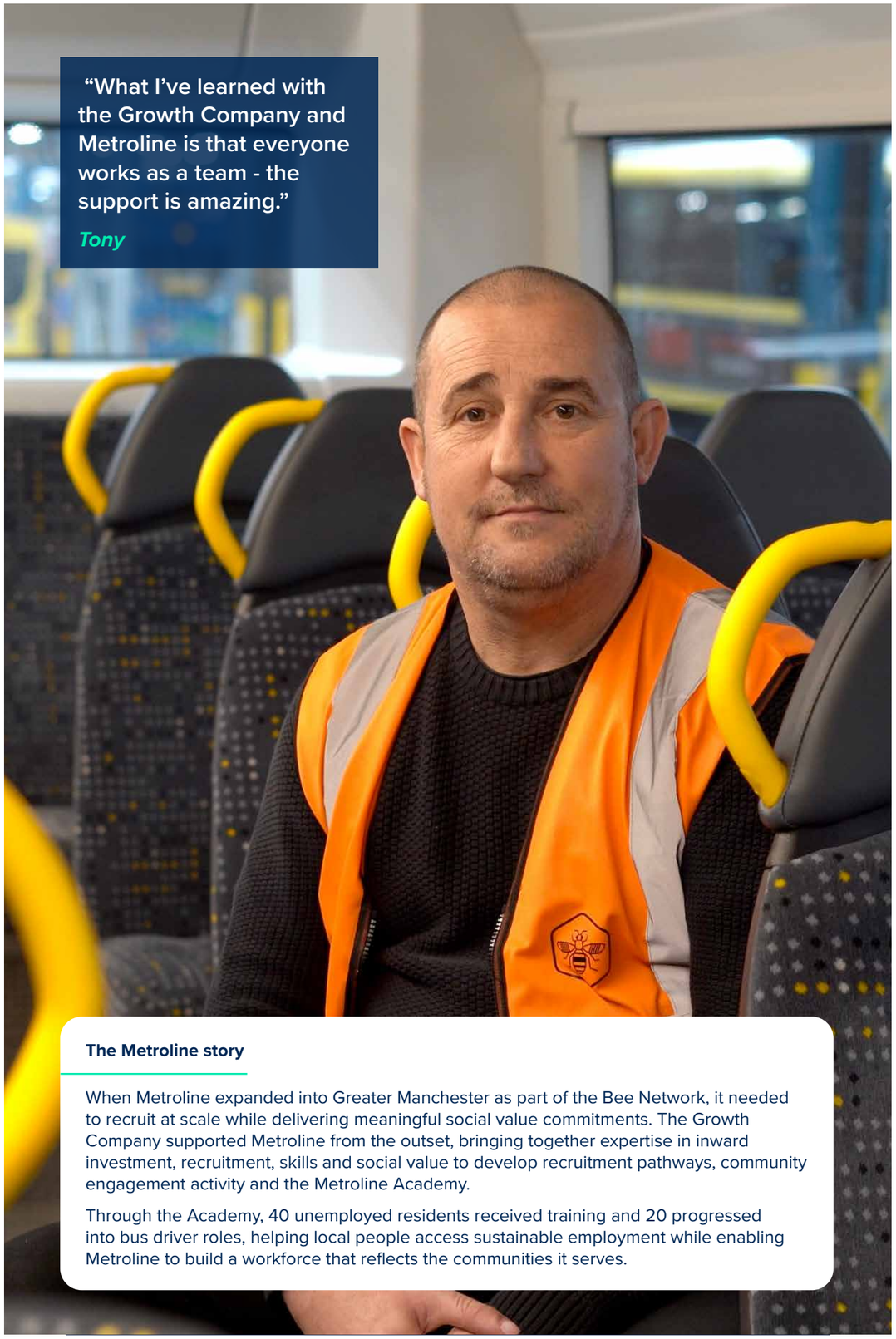
At 14, Max Fleming faced significant challenges, including exclusion from school and undiagnosed ADHD, autism and dyslexia. Through alternative provision and hands-on experience, he discovered a passion for construction and began a Level 2 Carpentry and Joinery apprenticeship with ConvertMy in 2023. Since then, he has been highly commended at the Construction Apprenticeship Awards and shortlisted for Apprentice of the Year at the Made in Manchester Awards. Max's journey demonstrates how technical education can unlock talent, build confidence and create rewarding careers.





Our Pass

For many young people, Our Pass is about far more than travel. Between 2023 and 2026 it has helped 59,394 young people access opportunities, experiences and support across Greater Manchester. For Our Pass ambassador Sam Boffey, it helped unlock access to education, skills and employment opportunities that shaped his future. Free and affordable travel enabled him to attend college in Salford and later take up an apprenticeship with BBC Studios. Sam credits Our Pass with giving him the freedom and opportunity to take those first steps.



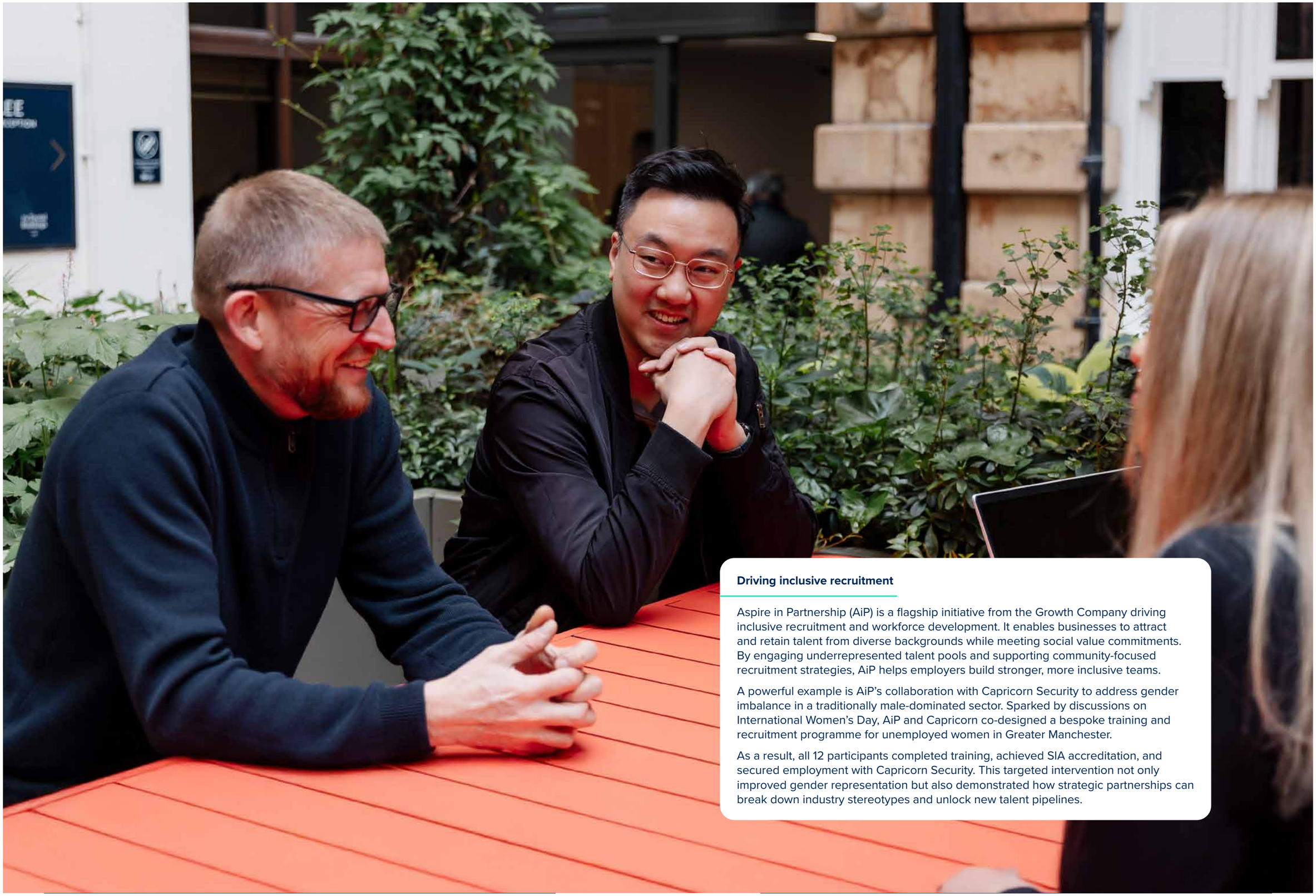
"What I've learned with the Growth Company and Metroline is that everyone works as a team - the support is amazing."

Tony

The Metroline story

When Metroline expanded into Greater Manchester as part of the Bee Network, it needed to recruit at scale while delivering meaningful social value commitments. The Growth Company supported Metroline from the outset, bringing together expertise in inward investment, recruitment, skills and social value to develop recruitment pathways, community engagement activity and the Metroline Academy.

Through the Academy, 40 unemployed residents received training and 20 progressed into bus driver roles, helping local people access sustainable employment while enabling Metroline to build a workforce that reflects the communities it serves.



Driving inclusive recruitment

Aspire in Partnership (AiP) is a flagship initiative from the Growth Company driving inclusive recruitment and workforce development. It enables businesses to attract and retain talent from diverse backgrounds while meeting social value commitments. By engaging underrepresented talent pools and supporting community-focused recruitment strategies, AiP helps employers build stronger, more inclusive teams.

A powerful example is AiP's collaboration with Capricorn Security to address gender imbalance in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Sparked by discussions on International Women's Day, AiP and Capricorn co-designed a bespoke training and recruitment programme for unemployed women in Greater Manchester.

As a result, all 12 participants completed training, achieved SIA accreditation, and secured employment with Capricorn Security. This targeted intervention not only improved gender representation but also demonstrated how strategic partnerships can break down industry stereotypes and unlock new talent pipelines.



Turning lived experience into lasting change

The DWP Peer Mentoring Programme has helped more than 700 people affected by substance dependency to rebuild confidence, improve wellbeing and take positive steps towards recovery, training and employment. Through trusted support from mentors with lived experience, participants such as John have moved into sustained employment, while others, like Steve, have achieved long-term sobriety and reconnected with family and community life. Just one example from our growing Employment, Justice and Health services, the programme demonstrates how lived experience and trusted relationships can help people overcome complex barriers and achieve lasting change.



United for Ukraine

United for Ukraine is a rapid-response employment initiative connecting Ukrainian refugees with supportive employers across the North of England. It has engaged over 5,000 refugees, placed more than 650 into employment with major employers, and partnered with over 200 businesses to offer Real Living Wage roles and wraparound support. It has been recognised at the ERSA Employability Awards 2024, CIPR North West PRide Awards 2024 and the IEP Learning Awards 2024, which recognised dedicated key worker Okszana Nepijvoda for her outstanding work in creating measurable impact for clients.

BUILDING A STRONGER, MORE INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION

Behind every outcome we deliver for people, businesses and places is a strong organisation.

As a social enterprise, creating social value is embedded in how we operate. We increased our impact through inclusive recruitment, responsible procurement, volunteering, community engagement and support for organisations seeking to maximise their own social value.

We also invested in improving our digital capability, strengthening leadership and culture, enhancing customer experience, building organisational resilience and embedding sustainability. This has enabled us to innovate, adapt and continue delivering high-quality services at scale while supporting to thrive.

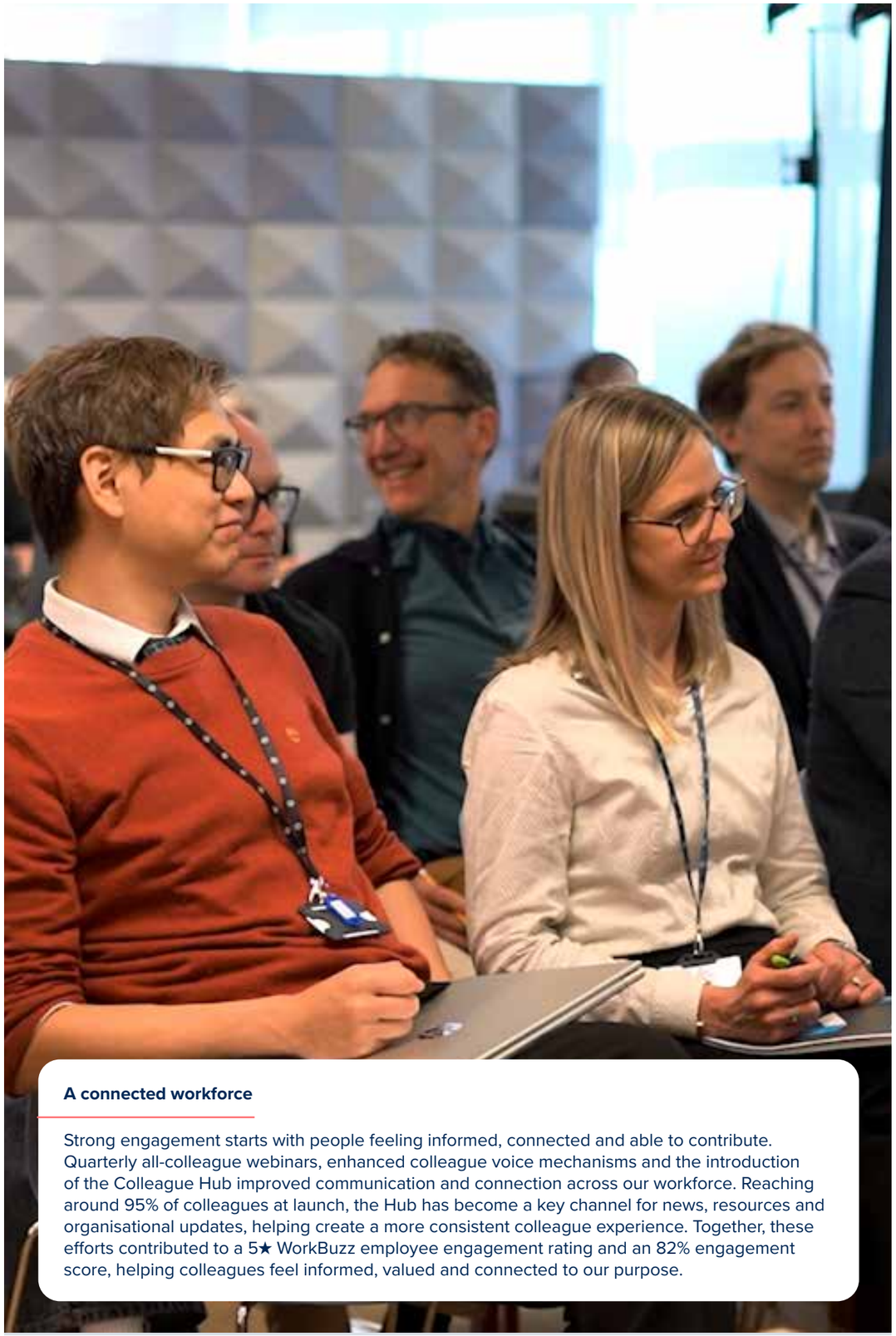
Key achievements

- **Aspire in Partnership** helped employers diversify their workforce and deliver social value commitments.
- Expanded inclusive procurement, directing **58%** of our **£62.8m** strategic spend through SMEs and VCSFE organisations.
- Supported communities through volunteering, mentoring and social value activity, extending our impact beyond contracted delivery.
- Achieved Carbon Literate Bronze accreditation with 29% of colleagues completing Carbon Literacy training, and maintained key environmental standards including ESOS, PPN 06/21 and ISO 14001.

79
Net Promoter Score

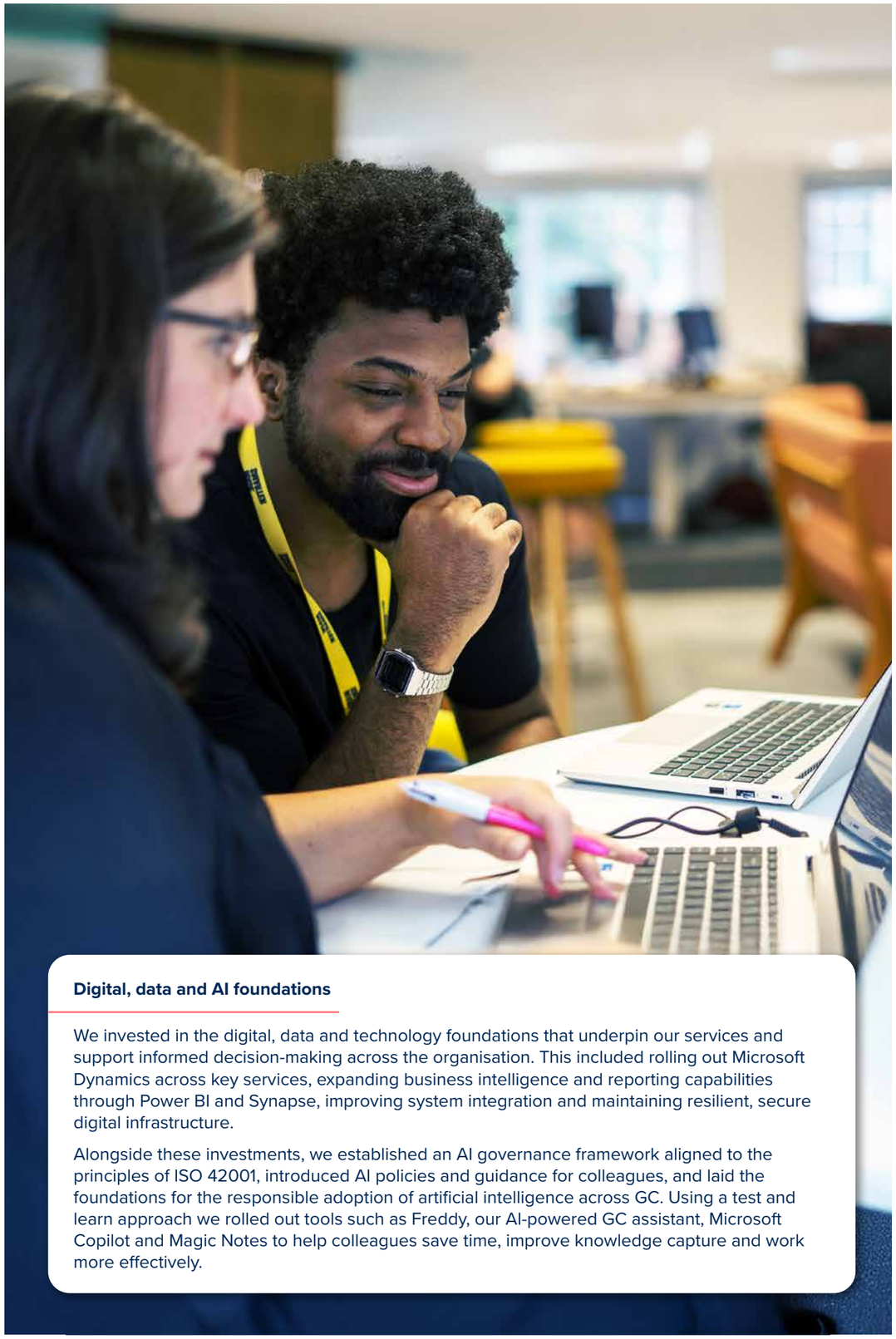
58%
strategic spend with SMEs/VCSFEs

82%
colleague engagement score



A connected workforce

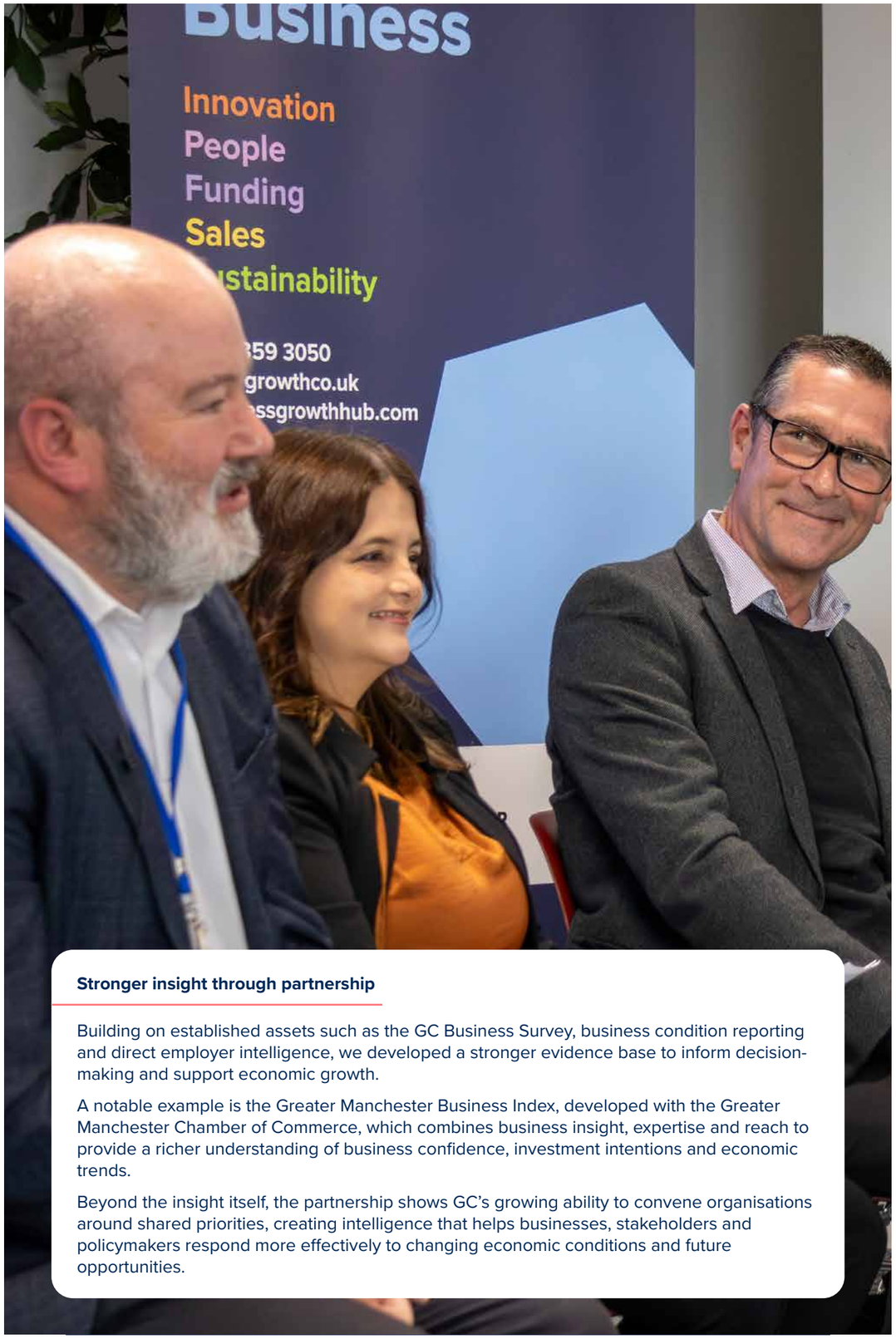
Strong engagement starts with people feeling informed, connected and able to contribute. Quarterly all-colleague webinars, enhanced colleague voice mechanisms and the introduction of the Colleague Hub improved communication and connection across our workforce. Reaching around 95% of colleagues at launch, the Hub has become a key channel for news, resources and organisational updates, helping create a more consistent colleague experience. Together, these efforts contributed to a 5★ WorkBuzz employee engagement rating and an 82% engagement score, helping colleagues feel informed, valued and connected to our purpose.



Digital, data and AI foundations

We invested in the digital, data and technology foundations that underpin our services and support informed decision-making across the organisation. This included rolling out Microsoft Dynamics across key services, expanding business intelligence and reporting capabilities through Power BI and Synapse, improving system integration and maintaining resilient, secure digital infrastructure.

Alongside these investments, we established an AI governance framework aligned to the principles of ISO 42001, introduced AI policies and guidance for colleagues, and laid the foundations for the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence across GC. Using a test and learn approach we rolled out tools such as Freddy, our AI-powered GC assistant, Microsoft Copilot and Magic Notes to help colleagues save time, improve knowledge capture and work more effectively.



Stronger insight through partnership

Building on established assets such as the GC Business Survey, business condition reporting and direct employer intelligence, we developed a stronger evidence base to inform decision-making and support economic growth.

A notable example is the Greater Manchester Business Index, developed with the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which combines business insight, expertise and reach to provide a richer understanding of business confidence, investment intentions and economic trends.

Beyond the insight itself, the partnership shows GC's growing ability to convene organisations around shared priorities, creating intelligence that helps businesses, stakeholders and policymakers respond more effectively to changing economic conditions and future opportunities.

An inclusive workplace where everyone can thrive

Through the work of our EDI networks, awareness campaigns and inclusive people practices, we have made significant progress in building a workforce that better reflects the communities we serve. This has contributed to a reduction in turnover among underrepresented groups from 38.9% to 11.3%, and greater workforce diversity across ethnicity (15.2% to 19.0%), disability (13.7% to 19.8%) and LGBTQ+ representation (7.0% to 8.7%).

These improvements demonstrate meaningful progress towards creating a workplace where colleagues from all backgrounds feel valued, supported and able to succeed.



ACCREDITATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

Our strong corporate planning, reporting and governance was reinforced by independent accreditations that validate how we work. From Investors in People to Cyber Essentials, they reflect our commitment to quality, inclusion, security, continuous improvement, and the high standards our colleagues uphold every day.

ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO/IEC 27001




The
Growth
Company