



# Report of GMB's PPE Fit for All campaign, outlining key issues, implications and recommendations for Local Authorities

## 1. Executive Summary

The **PPE Fit for All campaign** highlights a critical health and safety issue: personal protective equipment (PPE) that does not properly fit workers is unsafe and increases the risk of injury and ill health.

Evidence presented through the campaign identifies that ill-fitting PPE disproportionately affects a diverse workforce, including women, people of different body types, pregnant workers, disabled workers and some ethnic groups.

For local authorities (who act as both employers and regulators) there is a clear need to ensure procurement, policy, and enforcement practices deliver inclusive, effective PPE provision in line with legal duties.

## 2. Background to the Campaign

The PPE Fit for All campaign has been developed to address systemic issues in workplace safety where PPE design and procurement have historically been based on a limited body shape and size.

### 2.1 Our survey findings:

Our survey found that around 70% of all workers have experienced issues with ill-fitting PPE, examples include:

- oversize gloves reducing dexterity and creating entanglement risks
- Hi-vis clothing swamping smaller frames, increasing the chance of trips or snagging
- Respirators failing to seal properly, exposing wearers to hazardous dusts and chemicals

- Harnesses not sitting correctly on the hips or chest, undermining fall protection.
- A report of low-rise PPE trousers not fitting a female prison officer's body shape, resulting in prisoners being able to see her underwear and making sexual comments. This is not just unsafe; it is degrading. No worker should have to choose between protection and dignity.



### 2.2 PPE Fit for All core campaign messages:

- Ill-fitting PPE is unsafe, not just inconvenient
- The issue is systemic rather than individual
- Legal duties already exist to provide suitable PPE
- Change in procurement and design practices is overdue

## 3. Why This Matters for Local Authorities

Local authorities have multiple responsibilities:

### 3.1 As Employers

They employ large workforces in high-risk roles (e.g. waste collection, highways, social care, environmental services) where PPE is essential.

### **3.2 As Regulators and Commissioners**

They influence workplace safety through:

- Contracting and procurement frameworks
- Enforcement of health and safety standards
- Partnerships with private and voluntary sector providers

### **3.3 Equality and Legal Compliance**

Failure to provide suitable PPE may:

- Breach health and safety legislation (duty to provide suitable PPE)
- Risk non-compliance with equality legislation where certain groups are disproportionately affected
- Undermine workplace inclusion and retention strategies

## **4. Key Issues Identified**

### **4.1 Safety Risks**

- PPE that does not fit can fail to provide protection or even become a hazard itself
- Workers may improvise or avoid PPE altogether if it is uncomfortable or ineffective

### **4.2 Inequality in Provision**

- Standard issue PPE is typically designed around a “one size fits all” or male-centric model
- Diverse workers are more likely to receive ill-fitting equipment

### **4.3 Procurement Barriers**

- Procurement frameworks often prioritise cost and standardisation rather than fit and inclusivity
- Limited supplier engagement on inclusive design

### **4.4 Lack of Awareness and Data**

- Limited organisational awareness of PPE fit issues
- Lack of disaggregated data (e.g. by gender, body type, job role)

## 5. Key Asks for Local Authorities

### 5.1 Policy and Leadership

- Formally recognise PPE fit as a **health and safety and equality issue**
- Incorporate inclusive PPE standards into corporate health and safety policies
- Ensure senior leadership accountability for PPE provision
- [Sign up to GMB's Inclusive PPE Charter](#)

The graphic is a teal-colored poster with a white grid pattern. At the top left is the GMB Union logo. The main title is 'Inclusive PPE Charter' in large white font. Below the title is a mission statement: 'We believe every worker has the right to PPE that fits properly, protects effectively, and supports dignity at work. Poorly fitting PPE puts people at risk and can exclude staff from working safely. As an employer, we commit to the following:'. The core of the graphic is a list of five numbered points, each with a corresponding icon and a brief description:

- 1 PROTECTION**: We will ensure PPE selection is based on risk, fit and performance - convenience or cost-cutting will not be allowed to undermine safety. We will maintain a reporting system to action, track and prevent issues. (Icon: pair of gloves)
- 2 PROVISION**: We will procure PPE in a full range of shapes and sizes, actively working to achieve BS 30417. We will ensure PPE is stocked for women and diverse bodies, and replaced when worn, damaged or ineffective. (Icon: pair of safety glasses)
- 3 PROPER FIT**: We will provide fit testing and carry out regular checks to ensure PPE remains safe and effective. We will give workers the time, training and support needed to wear PPE correctly and confidently. (Icon: person wearing a hard hat and safety vest)
- 4 PEOPLE**: We will make it easy for workers to request alternative PPE without embarrassment, delay or judgement. We will not penalise workers for raising PPE concerns and ensure PPE supports dignity and inclusion. (Icon: pair of safety boots)
- 5 PARTNERSHIP**: We will consult with GMB reps and staff on PPE trials, procurement choices, reporting and improvements. We will work with partners and contractors to embed inclusive PPE standards across our industry. (Icon: pair of safety pants)

At the bottom of the graphic is a white rounded rectangle containing three fields: 'Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_', 'Signed: \_\_\_\_\_', and 'Date: \_\_\_\_\_'. There are also several small icons of PPE items scattered around the text, including a hard hat, safety glasses, a safety vest, safety pants, and safety boots.

### 5.2 Procurement Reform

- Require suppliers to provide:
  - A wide size range
  - PPE designed for diverse body types
  - Shoes and boots in more than one width and made on gender specific lasts
- Include **fit for purpose requirements** in tender specifications
- Move away from "one size fits all / unisex" contracts

### **5.3 Workforce Engagement**

- Involve workers and trade unions in:
  - PPE procurement conversations
  - PPE trials – ensuring it is tested on a diverse workforce
  - Detailed feedback processes
- Ensure access to multiple PPE options where required

### **5.4 Risk Assessment Improvements**

- Ensure PPE suitability assessments consider:
  - Individual fit
  - Body diversity
  - Specific job risks
- Require regular review of PPE effectiveness

### **5.5 Data and Monitoring**

- Collect and analyse data on:
  - PPE-related incidents
  - Fit-related complaints
- Monitor outcomes across workforce groups

### **5.6 Training and Awareness**

- Provide training for managers and procurement teams on:
  - The importance of PPE fit
  - Legal responsibilities
- Raise awareness among workers about their rights and responsibilities

## **6. Recommendations for Implementation**

### **Short-Term (0–12 months)**

- Conduct an audit of current PPE provision
- Identify workforce groups affected by poor fit
- Pilot inclusive PPE alternatives in key departments
- Make a commitment by signing up to [GMB's Inclusive PPE charter](#)

### Medium-Term (1–2 years)

- Update procurement frameworks to include inclusive specifications
- Build supplier partnerships focused on innovation in PPE design
- Introduce formal easy to access reporting mechanisms for PPE issues
- Work towards [British Standard BS30417](#) – Provision of Inclusive personal protective equipment.

### Long-Term (2+ years)

- Embed inclusive PPE within all contracts and commissioning
- Align PPE strategy with wider equality, diversity, and inclusion goals
- Share best practice across local authority networks

## 7. Conclusion

The PPE Fit for All campaign makes clear that **PPE that does not fit is fundamentally unsafe.**

For local authorities, addressing this issue is not only a matter of compliance, but also one of leadership in protecting workers, advancing equality, and setting standards across the wider economy.

By adopting the recommendations outlined above, local authorities can play a pivotal role in ensuring that all workers, regardless of body type or background, have access to PPE that protects them effectively.

Campaign resources and more information on our PPE Fit for All campaign can be found on our website – [PPE Fit For All | GMB Union](#)

If you would like to speak to our campaign leads or arrange a charter signing, please contact Lynsey Mann – [Lynsey.mann@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Lynsey.mann@gmb.org.uk) and Melanie Bartlett – [Melanie.bartlett@gmb.org.uk](mailto:Melanie.bartlett@gmb.org.uk)