



pro-manchester's

Regional Growth and Resilience Report

Q2 2026



pro-manchester



Executive summary

The first half of 2026 has been one in which businesses have navigated rapidly evolving changes and pressures.

We're excited to launch our first Regional Growth and Resilience Report, providing a snapshot of sentiment across our network of businesses and partners throughout Greater Manchester.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our survey. We'll be conducting these surveys every quarter to build a long-term picture of how organisations across Greater Manchester are responding to change, demonstrating resilience and continuing to thrive in the UK's fastest growing regional economy outside London.

Our report, which is based on data gathered in Q2 this year (April-June 2026), shows that businesses across Greater Manchester remain optimistic, despite the challenges and uncertainties they continue to face. To help achieve their growth ambitions, over 90% of respondents said they find the pro-manchester growth network valuable to them, with almost three quarters (72%) saying it is 'extremely valuable'.

Almost eight in 10 businesses are confident in their prospects over the next 12 months, while a significant majority believe that Greater Manchester is becoming a more competitive place to do business. We found that businesses are appreciative of our region's strengths, particularly its networks, collaborative culture and access to customers.

However, rising costs, changing customer demands and wage pressures continue to place significant strain on organisations across all sectors. While businesses generally feel their views are represented in regional decision-making, many still believe more could be done to help them address these issues.

There is still untapped opportunity for Greater Manchester's public and private sector to work closer together to maintain the momentum we've achieved in recent years, unlocking more investment and ensuring the region remains one of the most attractive to start, grow and invest in business. We're already looking forward to the next quarterly report following a significant few months for Manchester with the appointment of Andy Burnham as Prime Minister and No 10 North now in our city.

At pro-manchester, we remain committed to helping these businesses connect, develop and shape the future of our city region.

Sam Booth & Nicola McCormick
pro-manchester Co-CEOs



An outlook from those shaping the regional business landscape

Our report captures the views of organisations operating across Greater Manchester, providing insights from businesses of different sizes, across a wide range of sectors and from all parts of the region.

Almost one third (32.2%) of respondents employ between one and 10 people, while medium-sized businesses are also strongly represented. Together, they capture the experiences of organisations at different stages of growth, united by shared ambitions.

Financial and professional services businesses accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (42.4%), underlining the sector's significant contribution to Greater Manchester's economy. We also heard from organisations operating in the creative, digital and media sector (13.6%), and hospitality, leisure and tourism (11.9%), ensuring a diverse range of perspectives from some of the region's key growth sectors.

In the last year, we've expanded our growth network beyond Manchester's city centre, and our respondents reflect that broader reach from all boroughs across Greater Manchester.



Confidence, growth and investment

Businesses remain confident about the next 12 months, despite evolving challenges

Despite a tough economic backdrop, businesses across Greater Manchester continue to demonstrate confidence and resilience in the regional market.

A large majority (79.6%) of respondents are very or somewhat confident about their business performance over the next 12 months, with only a small proportion expressing concern.

Compared with six months ago, businesses appear cautiously optimistic. Nearly one third (32.5%) report feeling slightly more positive about their outlook, while just under a third (30.5%) say they feel about the same. Notably, no respondents reported feeling much more negative than they did six months earlier.

We found that most businesses are planning to maintain current levels of investment, but there are also encouraging signs of ambition in the region for further growth, highlighting business confidence in the potential for further expansion across Greater Manchester.

When asked about their plans to invest or expand in Greater Manchester over the next 12 months, almost half (45.6%) said their investment and expansion levels will remain unchanged. Encouragingly, 40.4% plan to undertake moderate investment or expansion in the region, while 5.3% expect to make significant investments or expand substantially.

“While businesses remain cautious of economic risks and aware of wider geopolitical volatility, confidence in the region continues to underpin investment decisions. Greater Manchester is a region where organisations are creating real opportunity for further progress and are driven in their pace and agility to create the conditions for growth. At pro-manchester we work to empower our members and adapt and act on the concerns that matter to them most. We share their ambitions and match their energy to help create opportunities that make real difference and overcome hurdles to growth.”

Nicola McCormick, Co-CEO of pro-manchester

Cost pressures continue to challenge businesses

While business confidence is strong, organisations are still facing a range of operational and financial challenges.

When asked for the top challenges that are impacting their business, rising costs were identified as the most dominant concern, with more than 60% of respondents saying it was their biggest worry.

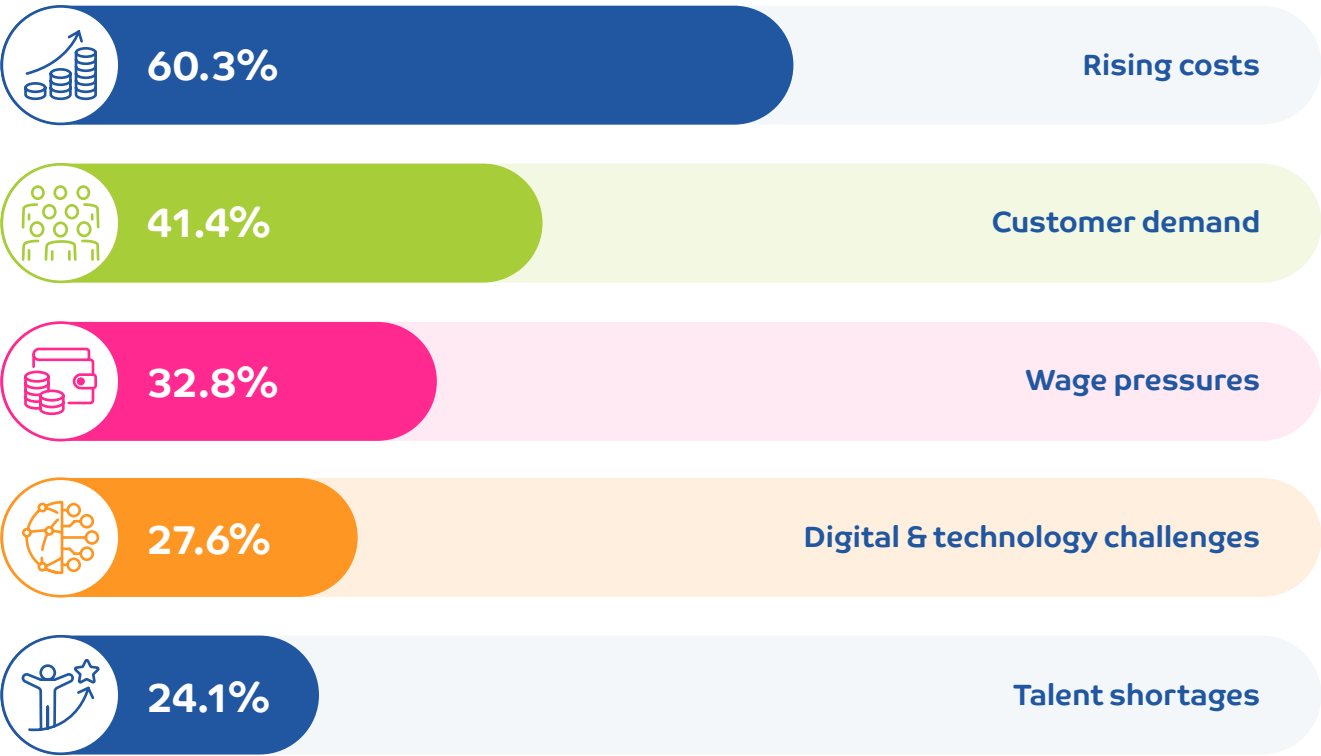
“We know from our work with members that businesses across different sectors and of different sizes are tackling ongoing pressures associated with inflation, operating costs and margin management. It’s been a challenging economy to drive growth in, but we’ve seen that resilience, connection and continuous improvement of skills and capabilities amongst businesses in Manchester have persevered and helped them to thrive, despite the odds.”

Sam Booth, Co-CEO of pro-manchester



Customer demand (41%) emerged as the second most significant challenge, highlighting continued uncertainty around market conditions and growth prospects. Businesses also identified wage pressures (32.8%), digital and tech challenges (27.6%) and talent shortages (24.1%) as potential barriers to growth prospects.

TOP CHALLENGES



The concerns from businesses indicate day-to-day economic pressures are currently having more of an impact on business performance than challenges around physical connectivity in the region or access to finance and investment.

“At pro-manchester, we are working to support businesses across the region to improve their productivity levels, adopt technology and strengthen their workforce capabilities to help address today’s challenges. People, talent and skills are key drivers. We are relentlessly focused on helping businesses across our growth network to overcome these challenges by championing ideas, influencing priorities and collaborating to create opportunities that drive long-term growth.”

Alison Loveday, Former pro-manchester Chair and Director

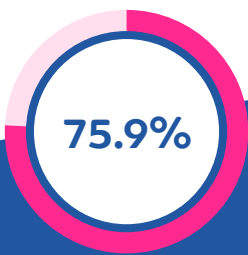
Greater Manchester's competitive advantage

A region built on connection and opportunity

What's clear is that businesses are still recognising the benefits of operating within Greater Manchester.

Local networks were identified as our region's greatest strength, with more than three quarters (75.9%) of respondents highlighting the value of relationships, connectivity and access to Manchester's wider business community.

Access to customers (56.9%) and collaboration opportunities (55.2%) also ranked highly, highlighting the continued importance of Manchester's diverse and interconnected economic ecosystem.



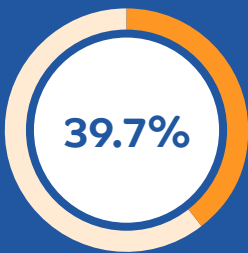
Strong local networks



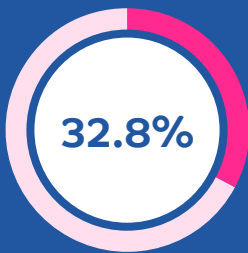
Access to customers



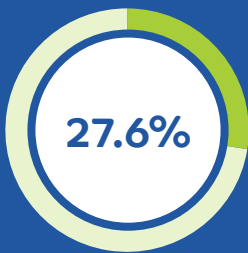
Collaboration opportunities



Access to talent



Established sector clusters



An increasingly innovative ecosystem



Infrastructure investment



Devolution and regional decision making



“What we believe really makes Greater Manchester stand out as a competitive place to do business is the collaboration and togetherness that businesses of all different sizes and sectors display. There is a real sense of coming together to give people opportunities, build meaningful connections and make strides in equity, diversity and inclusion. Every day, we hear from businesses and regional stakeholders about their belief in Manchester’s competitive edge, both for 2026 and the future, and our growth network continues to act as a vehicle to make that vision a reality.”

Nick Rose, Chairman of pro-manchester

More than three quarters (75.9%) of respondents believe the region is becoming a more competitive place to do business, including more than a third (36.2%) who believe it has become “much more” competitive.

The data suggests that Greater Manchester’s competitive edge is not defined by a single factor, but is a combination of strong business communities, diverse sectors and collaborative opportunities – this is what sets us apart and lays the foundations for growth.

The role of leadership and business representation

Businesses value collaboration, and want more of it

When asked how supported they feel by regional stakeholders in addressing key business challenges, responses were mixed.

Almost half (46.5%) feel neutral about the support they receive, whilst just under a third (31%) said they feel somewhat supported. Few businesses reported feeling either very supported (5.2%) or not supported at all (1.7%).

This highlights the opportunity we have to strengthen relationships between businesses and the organisations responsible for shaping the region's economic agenda.

Encouragingly, almost three quarters (74.1%) of respondents believe the voice of business is either represented (15.5%) or somewhat represented (58.6%) in regional decision making.

However, 10.3% remain unsure about the level of representation and support, with 15.5% saying they don't believe the voice of business is adequately represented in regional level decision-making. This underscores the importance of continuous and meaningful dialogue between regional stakeholders and business leaders.



Conclusion

Striving towards future growth

It's been encouraging to see that businesses remain optimistic about the second half of 2026, demonstrating resilience in the face of ongoing economic pressures.

Rising costs, changing customer demands and wage pressures remain the issues most likely to impact business performance and create challenges for business leaders.

But what's clear is how businesses consistently value Greater Manchester's collaborative culture, access to markets and strong professional networks.

At pro-manchester, we're passionate about ensuring our growth network helps to shape the conversations between regional stakeholders and business leaders by creating the conditions for growth and providing a platform for sharing successes and concerns. We work with ambitious businesses across Greater Manchester to help connect, develop and shape the future of the region.

The findings of this report present an overall positive picture of business sentiment across Greater Manchester. While challenges remain, organisations continue to demonstrate confidence in their own prospects and in the future potential of the region.

By strengthening collaboration, supporting growth and ensuring the voice of business remains central to decision-making, Greater Manchester is well positioned to build on its momentum and sustain long-term economic success.



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To find out more about the pro-manchester
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