



Northumberland

County Council

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Date: 26 January 2022

Petition from Hexham Living Wage Group

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Wendy Pattison, Adult Wellbeing

Purpose of report

To inform the Committee of a petition received from the Hexham Living Wage Group.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended:

- 1. To note that the objectives of this petition are consistent with recommendations made by the Cabinet which will be included in the proposed budget for 2022/23 to be considered by the Council at its budget meeting in February**
- 2. To consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations to the Council budget meeting**

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "Living" and "Thriving" priorities in the Corporate Plan.

Key issues

1. The petition asks the Council to allocate additional funding to care providers on condition that they use it to pay the "Real Living Wage" to care workers.
2. The Cabinet report included as an appendix to this report proposes an approach which would achieve this objective, which the Cabinet has endorsed.

Petition from Hexham Living Wage Group

BACKGROUND

1. The petition

- 1.1 The Council was presented in October 2021 with a petition organised by the Hexham Living Wage Group, which read as follows:

We call on Northumberland County Council to increase their subsidy for care services so that Care Workers can be paid the Real Living Wage

Northumberland County Council currently pays a lower rate of subsidy for residential care than other North East local authorities and this is cited by care providers as the reason for non payment of the Real Living Wage

Care in the Community organisations have also cited low levels of subsidy as the reason for their non payment of the Real Living Wage

Care workers say they have to work as many additional hours as they can get just to make ends meet. They struggle to find time for training and miss quality time with family They have no collective voice because they have no time to organise

We are calling on NCC to increase their subsidy to both residential and community care providers conditional on the payment of the Real Living Wage as a minimum for all their employees

We have clapped for our Care Workers, now let's ACT for them and give them a Real Living Wage.

- 1.2 The paper petition had circa 800 signatures. There was also an electronic petition on the Change.org website (viewable at www.tinyurl.com/RLWpetition), which as at 5 January 2022 had 1109 signatures, though many of these were from outside Northumberland, and only 79 provided a Northumberland postcode.
- 1.3 The petition arrived too late to be considered at the October meeting of this Committee.

2. Comments

- 2.1 The Cabinet considered on 11 January the report included as an appendix to this item, which addressed the main issue raised by the petition, and set this in the context of wider concerns about recruitment and retention of care workers. The Cabinet decided to recommend to the Council that it should include in its 2022/3 budget funding for implementing option C in the report, which would offer care providers funding to pay "Real Living Wage" rates.
- 2.2 If the Council accepts the budget to be recommended by the Cabinet, the main objective sought by the petitioners will be achieved. The Committee may wish to make its own recommendation to the Council on this point.

- 2.3 On one point raised by the petitioners, the Cabinet report provides information which appears to cast doubt on the connection which they have drawn between current pay rates in care homes and the fee rates paid to care home operators. While the data collected by Skills for Care referred to in paragraph 2.2 of the Cabinet report may not be wholly reliable, being based on a survey which not all providers complete, there do not appear in 2020/21 to have been substantial differences between pay rates for care workers in care homes in Northumberland and pay rates elsewhere in the region, though the petitioners are correct that the fee rates paid by the Council to operators of care homes for older people are significantly lower than those paid by some neighbouring local authorities.
- 2.4 This difference in fees will in part reflect differences between local authorities' assessments of their local care home markets, but may also be influenced by history. Legal challenges to fee levels set by local authorities in the region early in the last decade were successful in some cases, and though the challenges were made on procedural grounds, they were followed by increases in fees. Northumberland successfully defended in the High Court and the Court of Appeal its approach to setting fees, and while the Council has subsequently significantly increased the fees that it offers, particularly for residents with dementia, it has continued to adopt a rigorous approach when assessing the evidence about what fee levels are necessary to ensure that the sector is sustainable.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy	See the Cabinet report attached as an appendix
Finance and value for money	The budget to be presented to the Council's February budget-setting meeting will include the cost of adopting Option C in the Cabinet report.
Legal	See the Cabinet report
Procurement	See the Cabinet report
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	See the Cabinet report
Risk Assessment	See the Cabinet report
Crime & Disorder	None
Customer Considerations	See the Cabinet report
Carbon reduction	None

Health and wellbeing	See the Cabinet report
Wards	All

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Petition submitted by Hexham Living Wage Group.

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report.

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
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