

MINUTES OF THE OXFORD LIVING WAGE REVIEW GROUP SCOPING MEETING

Tuesday 1 August 2017

www.oxford.gov.uk



COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Iley-Williamson, Ladbroke (Chair) and Thomas.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Amanda Durnan (Strategic Procurement and Payments Manager), Matt Peachey (Economic Development Manager), Bruce Thompson (Building Ops Manager), Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer).

1. SCOPE OF OXFORD LIVING WAGE SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Economic Development Manager advised that there is no clear picture of which employers pay the Oxford Living Wage (OLW). The top 100 employers in Oxford employ almost 70,000 people in total, which represents over half of all the jobs in the city, so a focus on those employers is likely to make the biggest difference. The Review Group heard that the Westgate Oxford Alliance does pay the OLW but does not require or ask their tenants to do the same.

The Review Group questioned how the Council's policy of ensuring that contractors pay the OLW has been enacted. The Strategic Procurement and Payments Manager advised that potential suppliers are asked to self-certify that they (and their subcontractors) pay the OLW. However, the Council has no mechanism for verifying this. It is not possible to include payment of the OLW as a qualifying question in procurement processes or to judge tenders on this basis. The Review Group asked to see the legal advice to better understand what the barriers are. Members thought there might be an opportunity to work the OLW into quality standards in a way that can't be disregarded and asked for legal advice on how far it is possible to encourage payment of the OLW through procurement. The Review Group also noted that there might be an opportunity to identify good practices from other councils.

The Review Group members agreed that the OLW review should have two main aspects: the Council's direct business (including employment, contracts and regulation) and wider education and engagement with employers based in the city. It was also agreed that the review should seek to describe the size of the problem in human terms and include the testimony of individuals impacted by low wages, and of those who have personally benefited from the introduction of the Oxford Living Wage.

The Review Group noted that the Living Wage Foundation already accredits employers who pay the Living Wage or the London Living Wage rate and that replicating this system for the Oxford Living Wage would have resource implications. The Review Group also note that the payment of low wages in

Oxford create costs to the Council in other ways, e.g. through the payment of benefits such as Discretionary Housing Payments to low income households.

The Review Group suggested that outcomes of the review could include the following (in addition to those listed in the paperwork):

- A Council campaign to promote higher wages with some measurable uptake.
- Heightened awareness of the problem of low pay and how employees can raise concerns and access support services.
- A list of employers who pay the Oxford Living Wage.
- A portfolio responsibility for tracking numbers of employers who pay the OLW.
- The Council reaffirms its commitment to working with living wage campaigners

The Review Group agreed that it would be useful to speak to the following people at future meetings (in addition to those listed in the paperwork):

- A representative of the Living Wage Foundation
- Jim Hewitt, Blackbird Leys Credit Union
- Mark Fransham, Social Researcher
- A representative of the Council's Communications Team
- Employees impacted by low pay
- Employees who have benefited from being paid the OLW
- Anti-poverty campaigners

The Review Group agreed to request written testimony either to an email address or via a web survey. Elected members would also be asked to contribute examples of case work relating to the impacts of low pay.

The Review Group agreed to look at the possibility of meeting on 12 September and to hold at least one meeting at an earlier time of day.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.40 pm