



Report

**Survey on The Living Wage
in Swindon**

March 2015



SWINDON EQUALITY GROUP



Introduction

This survey was conducted by Swindon Churches Together and Swindon Equality Group during six weeks in the early part of 2015. The responses help to increase the resolve of the two organising groups to ensure the issue is discussed with parliamentary candidates, encouraging them to support the campaign. The survey responses also contribute to the narrative for the reduction of inequality in Swindon.

Anyone interested in helping this cause please contact us via either web site.

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Executive Summary

- 173 people responded to the survey over a period of 6 weeks
- The response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive in terms of employers paying the living wage in Swindon
- Particular difficulties were noted for small organisations however few people felt that there would be an increase in unemployment through paying the living wage.

Context

- Swindon Equality Group (SEG)

A group of local people who seek to raise awareness about income inequality and campaign to reduce it in the local area; the group is politically non-aligned and affiliated to The Equality Trust which is a national evidence-based campaign that aims to improve the quality of life in the UK by reducing inequality.

www.swindonequality.btck.co.uk

- Swindon Churches Together (SCT)

Swindon Churches Together exists to bring together the Churches across the Borough in witness and service, to strengthen ecumenical links, and for the Church's joint work and representation to the wider community.

www.swindonchurches.org

- Living Wage

Along with other issues SEG works on their current campaign which is to persuade Swindon Borough Council to pay the living wage to its employees and contracted staff. Over 1000 organisations now pay the living wage including three FTSE 100 companies. 82 councils in England and Wales (approximately 20% although many more are actively considering it) and all 32 councils in Scotland also pay the living wage.

www.livingwage.org.uk

- Relevant National and Local issues

- I. There has been much media attention over the last two years on issues of low pay, poverty and rising income inequality.
- II. Several areas of the country have used fairness commissions to examine local issues and suggest approaches.
- III. The numbers of people using food banks has risen significantly over this period (6,000 recipients in Swindon), a further indication that low pay is having a significant impact locally.
- IV. Over 6 million people or 20% of the UK work force are paid below the living wage. Almost 4 million of these are women.
- V. 13% of the UK work force is self employed
- VI. 16 million people who were registered, did not vote in the 2010 general election

Survey Purposes

- To provide information about employment and pay in Swindon
- To provide views and opinions that people have about the living wage
- To provide data that can be used alongside a similar survey sent to Swindon employers
- To provide generic information that might help form questions at the parliamentary hustings
- To help gauge the connection that Swindon people have with the 2015 election(s)

Methodology

- The Social and Economic sub group of Swindon Churches Together met with members of the Swindon Equality Group and decided to conduct a living wage survey.
- 'Survey Monkey' was selected for ease of use. Only one entry per digital identity was allowed.
- The survey was made available via SCT and SEG web sites and publicised through various routes.
- The final report is being made available in digital format via SCT and SEG websites, will be sent as an attachment to those on group mailing list(s) and will be supplied in printed format where required.

Results *(all percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number)*

- 173 people completed the survey

- **Gender:**

Female	65%
Male	35%
Not responding	1

- **Age categories:**

18-24	3%
25-34	17%
35-44	28%
45-54	23%
55-64	15%
65-74	9%
77 and over	5%
Not responding	1

▪ **Political Constituencies represented:**

Swindon North	63%
Swindon South	37%
Not responding	15

▪ **Employment Status:**

Full Time	53%
Part Time	25%
Unemployed	2%
Retired	17%
Self Employed	2%
Carer/volunteer	0.5%
Ill	0.5%

Comments:

One person said that they had never found the right opportunities to work within their skill set and another that they were employed on a temporary contract.

▪ **Pay Status:**

Paid below the minimum wage of £6.50 p.h.	3%
Paid below the living wage of £7.85 p.h.	16%
Paid above the living wage	71%
Paid on zero hours contract	2%
Those on a pension	8%*

** not originally requested but taken from comments given*

Not responding	25
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▪ **What do you think would be the advantages to individuals/businesses/Swindon if the minimum wage was raised to the level of the living wage?**

This question encouraged people to tick all that applied - the percentage figures therefore relate to each particular question as if it stood alone and not in relation to the others.

Helping to reduce poverty	76%
More workers being able to afford housing costs	71%
Reduction in the benefits bill	58%
Swindon becoming known as a 'living wage' town	54%

Workers spending the majority of the increase locally	49%
Improved retention	43%
Enhancing the quality of work	40%
Improved recruitment	36%
Workers more willing to implement changes	30%
Lower turnover of contractors	19%
Increased consumer awareness	16%

Comments fell into two broad areas:

- a) Benefits to employees and companies – providing a sense of value for workers who would then demonstrate a greater commitment to the company and help to improve standards through higher motivation and greater productivity,
- b) Benefits to Swindon and the UK through improvements in individual and family education and health along with a movement of people off benefits

▪ **What do you think would be the disadvantages to individuals/businesses/Swindon if the minimum wage was raised to the level of the living wage?**

This question encouraged people to tick all that applied - the percentage figures therefore relate to each particular question as if it stood alone and not in relation to the others.

Increased Wage Bill	67%
Increased prices passed on to the consumer	53%
Reduction of profit margins	47%
Closure of (smaller) companies	36%
Redundancies	34%
Impact on pay structure(s)	24%
Increased unemployment	18%
Reduction in share prices (where applicable)	8%
Increased difficulty in engaging contractors	7%

Comments focussed on two areas:

- a) Several people stated that there would be no disadvantages to introducing a living wage as introducing the minimum wage proved unproblematic and the benefits of introducing the living wage would outweigh any likely problems
- b) Particular issues that arise for small businesses were noted and the possibility that Swindon (as a living wage town) might attract a workforce that would replace local people

▪ **Do you intend to vote in the general election**

Yes	94%
No	6%
Not responding	0

Comments fell into two areas with this question:

- a) There is no surprise that people who completed this survey are more likely to say they will vote however twenty people took the opportunity to express how important voting was to them in terms of responsibility, duty, right, obligation and contribution to the outcome
- b) A second group expressed their issues with the current politicians/political parties in negative terms while only two said that they had no idea who to vote for at this stage.

▪ **How are you likely to get your information prior to voting**

This question encouraged people to tick all that applied - the percentage figures therefore relate to each particular question as if it stood alone and not in relation to the others.

TV	72%
Digital formats (various)	57%
Radio	42%
Daily Newspaper	37%
Attend Hustings	21%
Sunday Newspaper	11%

Comments in this section fell into three broad areas:

- a) Information supplied by the parties/candidates themselves in the form of manifesto's, leaflets, meetings and canvassing
- b) Relying on networks of family, friends, work colleagues or groups that the person already encounters (including 'at the bus stop')
- c) Three people claimed that they would use none of the above

▪ **The survey also asked for any *general comments* and these fell into four broad areas:**

- a) Support in principle for the Living wage and recognition that those paid below the level of £7.85 p.h. are unable to live with dignity. "People are having to go cold and hungry in Britain in 2015", and the illegal exploitation of some "I have worked in social care since aged 18 and am now thinking of quitting to look after my own family as pay is so poor", especially those who have recently arrived in Swindon from other countries
- b) Recognition that there may be difficulties for some businesses to pay the living wage
- c) Allied issues including – the problems with zero hours contracts, the lack of full time contracts and the impact on benefits claimants
- d) The difficulties in identifying parties/politicians who understand the problem of low pay and are willing to do something about it.

Conclusions

This survey was not targeted at a representative sample of the Swindon population however there has been participation from a range of ages, a range in terms of employment status and of pay status.

Participation in the survey was significantly skewed towards females and towards those who are resident in the North Swindon constituency.

The response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive in terms of employers paying the living wage in Swindon.

There is a clear message from approximately three quarters of those surveyed that payment of a living wage would impact positively on poverty and on making life affordable.

Significantly fewer people in the survey selected the possibilities offered as disadvantages for paying the living wage with less than one fifth feeling that it might increase unemployment.

Some respondents claimed that they are in employment and being paid below the minimum wage (which is illegal).

There was recognition that smaller businesses might have particular difficulties in paying the living wage.

An extremely large proportion of respondents said that they would vote in the forthcoming election and over 10% were strident in their desire to do so.

Well over half of our respondents said that they would make use of digital formats to obtain information about the forthcoming election.

A significant number of people said that they would make use of existing social and work related networks to gain the information they needed to help them decide how to vote.

A significant percentage of respondents took the opportunity to make positive comments about the Living Wage and associated issues.

There were many similarities in the views expressed in this survey with those expressed by Swindon employers who were surveyed in the Autumn of 2014*

*Swindon Living Wage Survey – final report [Living Wage Survey final report.pdf](#)

If you wish to find out more about the Living Wage then visit:
<http://www.livingwage.org.uk>

