



Archbishop Stephen Cottrell writes in the [Yorkshire Post](#) on the value of the Living Wage

“Let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.”

Psalm 79’s plea for mercy and compassion has never been more relevant as we reflect on the role of key workers this Living Wage Week.

It speaks to the sharply different experiences of the dark early months of the pandemic. Key workers like hospital porters, care workers, cleaners, food factory and supermarket workers and couriers have been keeping the UK going and caring for our elderly and vulnerable.

Millions of other workers, whose jobs were put at risk by the lockdown, have been protected by the Government’s furlough scheme. Others fell through the cracks with no support. Millions worked safely from home. But many others did not have this option, and often they were those on the lowest wages. Millions more were alone and isolated as they shielded.

But what we did have was a sense of being in this together and at our best we looked out for each other. We not only cheered the NHS and key workers on Thursday evenings, that applause overflowed into action. Churches and other places of worship had to close. But the food banks they run were busier than ever. Hundreds of thousands volunteered for the NHS and mutual aid schemes sprung up spontaneously across the country. Homeless people were housed in hotels.

This same sense of our shared humanity is what the real Living Wage is all about. Today the Living Wage Foundation announced the rate, set in accordance with the real cost of living, will rise to £9.50 an hour, and £10.85 in London.

This means a welcome pay boost for over 250,000 low-paid workers, those who need it most. Over 800 new employers have accredited since the start of lockdown. Almost 7,000 employers have now committed to paying their workers a real Living Wage, worth £4,000 more than the minimum wage in London and £1,500 more in the rest of the UK.*

At a time when so many employers and workers are struggling, it is heartening to hear this. I am hopeful that even more employers will now join this growing movement to end the scourge of low pay and level up communities, and enable all workers to meet their everyday needs - be it a healthy meal on the table each day, a surprise dentist trip, or Christmas presents for the children. The campaign, founded by members of Citizens UK in East London and now a national movement, has now put well over £1.3 billion of additional pay back into low paid families’ pockets.

But we must not rest on our laurels. Even as we celebrate, far too many key workers remain underpaid, overworked and poorly protected.

The reality is that as the clapping drew to an end, the sacrifices that key workers were making did not. Over 300 NHS and care workers have died from Covid-19. We know supermarket workers face heightened risk from the disease. One care worker reported relying on food handouts after being struck down by Covid-19 for nearly a month. And it is worth remembering that even now cleaners aren't considered key workers by official Government definitions.

Hundreds of thousands of key workers are only paid the minimum wage for caring for our elderly and vulnerable. That's why I, along with others, am backing the campaign to ~~invest in a real~~ **Living Wage for Care Workers** as a next important step.

So as we enter a new lockdown, let us take heart from the actions of Living Wage employers who have stood by their workers in tough times. Let us continue to be compassionate to those who are brought low through isolation and destitution. And let us stand by all low paid workers in our communities and help them by making the case for a real Living Wage.

If we are going to bring real equality and level up the country, then people trapped in poverty need to be paid a proper wage. This is the very best future for all of us.

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