

St Keverne Care Manager raises issue of living wage with Deputy Prime Minister

Care Manager, Laura Palmer and Team Leader Melissa Knight from home care company MSS Care in St Keverne, were amongst those who participated in a round table discussion over a buffet lunch with the Deputy Prime Minister and Liberal Democrat Leader Rt. Hon Nick Clegg MP today Monday 8th April 2013.

Following his visit to MSS Care, in February, to discuss home care issues in the rural environment, West Cornwall and Isles of Scilly MP Andrew George invited MSS Care to participate in a round table discussion on the issues effecting local business and the economy with the Deputy Prime Minister today.

During today's discussion Laura Palmer raised the issue of a living wage as part of our work towards minimum standards of practice from Home Care companies and commissioners of care. Of particular concern is a commitment to some basic principles which are vital if rural home care companies are to be viable and provide the service people require and expect. These principles are:

- Paying staff a living wage
- Appropriate length of visit time
- Paying staff for mileage and time between clients
- Recognition and registration of care workers
- Fair and efficient standards for monitoring calls.

MSS Care are particularly concerned that low rates of pay and not paying staff between visits, proper mileage and having unrealistic travel times between visits forces staff to cut visits short and drive inappropriately between visits. MSS Care are committed to the Living wage and will continue to resist financial pressures to lower standards by reducing pay, training, supervision and ultimately the quality of staff, which puts vulnerable people at risk.

The Deputy Prime Minister expressed support and stated that he is also a supporter of the living wage but does not feel that it can be made compulsory across the board, however he did go on to say there are certain sectors where he feels this should happen, care being one of them.

Our Care Managers Report is as follows:

“Mel and I arrived in good time and felt very intimidated by all the men and suits, about 50 of us in total, but soon realised we were all of equal standing and have built our businesses from scratch, I had a good team leader at my side and settled in. Nick Clegg had sent his apologies as he was running late from the Eden visit and would be with us shortly. I introduced myself to other business owners and explained a little about MSS Care and the difficulties we are facing, everyone I spoke to agreed that the sector of care as a whole is struggling and there are tough times ahead unless people stick together, support each other and stand up to the bigger organisations.

We spent half hour mingling with others and drinking tea before a buffet lunch was served and we went through to the round tables, it was very pleasant and had an informal casual vibe to the whole thing. Nick Clegg arrived and made a point to introduce himself to everyone personally with Andrew George, I got to shake his hand and introduce myself and Mel and what MSS did as a business. Once we had lunch Nick Clegg gave a little talk about where the government stood regarding small businesses and acknowledging that many are in need of different funding pots to survive.

Once he had finished Andrew George introduced nine of us who had questions they wanted to put forward, the other questions asked were mainly regarding tax, bank loans and interest rates. When it came to me, I introduced myself and the company, told him that we are very big supporters of the living wage, however without the support and commitment of organisations who commission the care we are really struggling to give the care that is needed and elderly people are being put at risk. In addition the amount of time we are given to carry out personal care is ridiculous, on some cases even given 15 minutes to carry out personal care. I also bought up the point that we as many other care agencies in this area, are rural companies and what we are commissioned for a call wouldn't even cover the time or mileage to get there, how can we then afford to train our staff to an acceptable level when we can't even afford the care. Our carers need to be recognised for what they do.

Nick Clegg first responded to the issue of the living wage by explaining that by the income tax threshold was being raised this year (1st April) and again next year then the hope is that this will even out the living wage as people can earn more money before they are taxed, Nick Clegg stated that he is also a huge supporter of the living wage but does not feel that it can be made compulsory across the board, however he did go on to say there are certain sectors where he feels this should happen, care being one of them. He said that he doesn't feel that care workers are recognised for the work that they do. Andrew George joined the discussion and said he was working closely with myself and MSS Care Management regarding living wage, a care standard that needs to be set and staff being recognised for what they do.

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He took a couple of questions from others and then had to make a move, the meeting was very over shadowed by Margaret Thatcher's death as in media trying to get a statement from him but it was handled very professionally.

I would like to say that Andrew George was an excellent host and made Mel and myself feel very comfortable." Laura Palmer – Care Manager MSS Care 8th April 2013

If you require any further information please contact Laura Palmer 01326 281301
laura@martinssltd.co.uk