

Winter Fuel Payments and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty - Motion included on the agenda by Councillor de Freitas

Amendment from Councillor Dowling

Council Notes:

- The out of control inflation, rising cost of living and rising energy costs which occurred under the previous Conservative Government amid the financial mismanagement and chaos under 14 years of Conservative cuts to public services and rising taxes.
- The announcement today of falling inflation rate.
- This Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- Age UK suggest the impact of this decision will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments plays in helping some older residents of West Lancashire and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health, and the Government's commitment to retain the Winter Fuel Payments for those most in need.
- The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible – estimated to be up to 880,000, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many pensioners across West Lancashire who are not in receipt of Pension Credit but on a low income will now lose their allowance and may seek support from the Household Support Fund.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, could disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach must consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Council resolves to:

- Continue our Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- Seek urgent clarity on the Household Support Fund and ensure this information is updated on the council's website, advertised through social media, and alerted through partners within the statutory and VCFS to ensure the widest breadth of residents are made aware of and supported by the fund.
- Request that the Chief Executive write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- Write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK.
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in West Lancashire are supported in claiming their entitlement.