

Joint Administration Proposed Amendment to the Winter Fuel Allowance motion

Council Notes:

- The Labour 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, as part of a range of urgent measures the Government is taking in response to a £22b budget gap left by the previous Government.
- ~~•~~The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says 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 play in helping older residents of Welwyn Hatfield and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- 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, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Council believes:

- ~~•~~ThatSince its introduction by a Labour Government in 1997 at a cost of nearly £2Bn per annum, 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 thousands across Welwyn Hatfield sit just above the ~~cut-off~~cutoff for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.
- In seeking to close the identified £22b black hole in the nation's finances inherited from the previous Government, other options should be considered such as a potential

'wealth tax' on the country's richest 1% and the implementation of an effective windfall tax on energy companies which addresses the loopholes the previous government included in its previous iteration.

Council resolves to:

- Bring~~Work~~ with all relevant agencies, including the Government, to bring forward a ~~Council-led~~ local awareness campaign to alert those eligible ~~effor~~ Pension Credit, which ~~in some respects~~ will help those most in need access ~~to~~ the Winter Fuel Payment ~~for those most in need~~.
- ~~Request that~~Through the ~~Council~~ Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking~~ask~~ the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty; to accelerate much needed rationalisation of energy pricing, and introduce widespread social tariffs for all those on low income.
- ~~Conduct a local impact assessment to provide insights into possible actions the Council can take to mitigate the effects of fuel poverty. This should include budget considerations for any support that could be offered in future years.~~
 - Encourage ~~local~~all efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through ~~council~~Council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Welwyn Hatfield are supported in claiming their entitlement- and ensure this support is continued to be offered in future years.
 - Request that the County Council explores ways to use the recently extended Household Support Fund, which has now been extended to April 2025, to mitigate impacts of fuel poverty this winter.
 - Work with other agencies and partnerships such as the Home Energy Retrofit Offer (HERO) scheme and others to identify and explore what further actions the Council can take to mitigate fuel poverty.