

NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 16

To consider the following notice of motions submitted under Procedure Rule 16:

1. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor M.Siewniak, and will be seconded by Councillor L.Musk

“The Elections Act 2022 was a major piece of national legislation with local implications for the residents of this local authority, including the use of mandatory photographic voter ID at the polling station, changes to overseas voting and voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens.

The Act adds complexity to voter eligibility in the UK and excludes more residents from democracy. EU citizens who enter the UK from the 1st of January 2021 and are not covered by bilateral voting rights treaties (currently only active with Poland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, and Denmark) will not have voting and candidacy rights in local elections. Over 170,000 EU citizens in England and Northern Ireland will be removed from the electoral register as a consequence of the Elections Act.

According to the 2021 census, one in six usual residents of England and Wales were born outside the UK. However, under this act, over 1 million residents across England and Northern Ireland do not have a right to vote in any election. According to the ONS 2021 Census data for Welwyn Hatfield, a total of 9,701 EU citizens reside in the area and have local voting rights. A further 1,299 residents are from nationalities with no eligibility to vote in any election.

Scotland and Wales introduced residence-based voting rights where all residents with lawful immigration status have the right to vote in local and devolved national elections. Over 50% of people agree that every resident, no matter where they are from, should have the right to vote at least in local elections.

Since many of Welwyn Hatfield residents come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, regard Welwyn Hatfield as their home and bring significant value to our area, their voices should be heard in our local democracy

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council commits to:

- Writing to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government requesting that the franchise for local elections be extended to all qualifying foreign nationals in England and Northern Ireland in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales.
- Writing to the Welwyn Hatfield MP, Andrew Lewin asking that he lend his support to the request for local election eligibility to be extended to all qualifying foreign nationals in England and Northern Ireland in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales.

In addition, Welwyn Hatfield Council will:

- Continue to work collaboratively with voluntary sector organisations in our local authority to inform residents about their democratic rights
- Continue to promote Voter registration and photo ID requirements”

2. The following motion has been submitted by Councillor T.Kingsbury, and will be seconded by Councillor M.Short

“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.
- 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:

- 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 thousands across Welwyn Hatfield sit just above the cut-off 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.

Council resolves to:

- Bring forward a 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.
- Request that the Council Leader 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.
- 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 efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through 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.”