

Calling for a new threshold to determine Winter Fuel Payment eligibility

This Council meeting notes the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits.

This Council Meeting ~~notes~~ ~~is deeply concerned~~ that many pensioners on lower and middle incomes will now not receive the payments:

- Across England and Wales the number of people eligible for winter fuel payments will fall by 10 million to only 1.5 million.
- In Stockport, 50,242 pensioners will be affected by the change, meaning 89.80% of Stockport's pensioners will no longer ~~receive~~ ~~be able to claim~~ the payment from this winter onwards.

~~This Council meeting believes that the Labour Government has set the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments far too low – only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits, significantly below the living wage rate.~~

This Council meeting is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit, with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. ~~According to Policy in Practice, it is believed that over 3,300 Stockport residents are not claiming this support despite being eligible for it.~~

~~The Cabinet~~ This council has already taken active steps to increase pension credit take up in recent years but recognises the role we must play to continue to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to encourage people to claim the support they are entitled to.

This Council meeting further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October with a further rise forecast for January. ~~which, combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments, will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.~~

This Council meeting resolves to:

(1) Ask the Chief Executive to:

- Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to call for the Government to identify those pensioners who are eligible for pension credit and make the process easier. The council should then write to those who are eligible to encourage take-up. Council will also take the opportunity to acknowledge the extension of the Household Support Scheme, which gives councils flexibility in terms of how it is spent to support cost of living pressures. ~~write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new, more reasonable threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel; Payments.~~
- Share this letter with the MPs for Cheadle, Hazel Grove and Stockport, asking them to give their formal support to ~~halting the planned changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.~~ ensuring the Government does everything it can to contact those eligible for Pension Credit.

(2) Ask the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources to:

- Commence a further, significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pension credits and ensure residents know about the government's proposed change to the Winter Fuel Allowance, including the use of council noticeboards, social media, local press and targeted letters to those who may be eligible.
- Consider whether it will be possible to continue to offer the Warm Spaces scheme again this winter

(3) Inform the Cabinet that it is the view of this Council Meeting that it amends the Stockport Household Support Fund delivery plan to explicitly protect Stockport's most vulnerable pensioners through this winter period. This support should be provided in alignment with our trusted partners to ensure nobody falls through the cracks. It should also build on the work already done to support Pension Credit uptake through the Cost of Living Hub. Support for vulnerable pensioners should be easily accessible for those without computer access.

(4) Ask the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources to Consider and look to replicate the work of Milton Keynes City Council, which will provide a new local threshold to determine winter fuel payment eligibility for those above the Pension Credit threshold, using the Household Support Fund. This could be set so those earning 1p-£1000 a year over the Pension Credit threshold can receive energy vouchers to go towards their energy costs.

Moved by: Councillor David Meller

Seconded by: Councillor Christine Carrigan

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