

Council – 16 October 2024

Labour Party Group Amendment to motion 5a – Winter Fuel

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.
- There are more than 41,450 people over age of 65 in Trafford, 17.6% of the population, and most of these residents will be pensioners.
- 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 Trafford 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 previous Conservative Government wrecked our economy, leaving a £22bn black hole in the public finances.
- It will take time to repair the previous Government's financial mismanagement and the new Government will have to consider some difficult decisions.
- We have a strong track record in supporting people out of poverty, especially in response to some of the pernicious decisions taken by Conservative-led governments from 2010-2024.
- 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 as many thousands across Trafford 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, was unexpected and

could disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.

- The government's approach needs to give greater consideration to the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.
- The Government's commitment to protect the triple lock is welcome.
- The Government's decision to extend the Household Support Fund for a further six months whilst exploring options around how best to provide sustainable support to vulnerable households in the longer term is also welcome.

Therefore, Council:

- Notes the Leader's letter to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions acknowledging the country's fiscal challenges and expressing our desire to collaborate with the national government to support residents, particularly through encouraging Pension Credit sign-ups. Council also notes we have expressed an interest in participating in any pilot programs to improve Pension Credit uptake and reduce poverty in the community. Will continue and expand our Communications Campaign to encourage greater awareness and uptake of Pension Credits including targeted letters to those who may be eligible.
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- We will continue to support our dedicated Council Pension Credit action group and our Poverty lead in bringing together key Trafford agencies and community groups to encourage and support people to claim Pension Credit.
- Will continue to support and further fund more staff hours in our Exchequer services team and a specialist worker to identify those who receive Housing Benefit but not claiming Pension Credit, so we can target our efforts on a one to one personal basis. As such have requested the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide better data on eligible households.
- Will continue our mission to support people out of poverty by ensuring advice and guidance remains in place to enable people to access all benefits they're entitled to.