

## **Council – 16 October 2024**

### **Liberal Democrats 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.
- According to Department of Work and Pensions data, 34,706 pensioners in Trafford will lose out. That means 89% of pensioners currently eligible for Winter Fuel Payments will no longer be able to claim the payment from this winter onwards. There are an estimated 9,766 Trafford pensioners over the age of 80 who are set to lose out.
- 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.
- A significantly increased communications budget was approved in February, enabling the Council to support residents with the challenges they are facing.

#### 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 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, 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.
- Take up of Pension Credit has been worryingly low, more than one in three eligible pensioners are not signed up.

This Council further notes that:

- The Energy Price Cap has risen by 10% this month, which combined with the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Therefore, Council:

- Requests that the Council Leader and 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.
- Will use the Council's significantly increased communications budget to commence a Communications Campaign to encourage greater awareness and uptake of Pension Credits including a dedicated advice line, promotion in the local press, as well as targeted letters to those who may be eligible.
- Will sign the Age UK petition to save the Winter Fuel Payment for struggling pensioners and will encourage all members to do the same.