

Somerset Council

Full Council
26 September 2024



Motion

Division / Local Member: All

Lead Officer: David Clark, Monitoring Officer and Service Director - Governance, Democratic and Legal Services

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Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and protecting Somerset pensioners from fuel poverty

To be proposed by Cllr David Fothergill and seconded by Cllr John Hunt.

Somerset 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 110,000 older residents of Somerset 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, over 100,000 across Somerset are 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.*

Therefore Somerset 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 Cllr Bill Revans, Council Leader write a cross-party letter 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.*
- *Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.*
- *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 Somerset are supported in claiming their entitlement.*

Implications

- 1.1 It should be noted that Winter Fuel Allowance is a central and not local government function.
- 1.2 Whilst there are no direct financial implications, it should be noted that the awareness campaign as proposed would have some resource implications for the Council's Communications Team and on the capacity of local charities and community organisations to respond.

Report assurance

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	18/09/24
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	18/09/24
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	18/09/24
Asset Management (*)	Oliver Woodhams	n/a
Executive Director	Paul Coles / Sarah Dowden	18/09/24