

# Full Council

16 OCTOBER 2024

## NOTICE OF MOTION – CHANGES TO THE WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE AND PROTECTING PENSIONERS FROM FUEL POVERTY

*Mover Councillor Crow and Seconder Councillor Burgess*

### **This 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, which impacts up to an estimated 13,000 pensioners in Crawley.
- 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 Crawley and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change, done without an impact assessment.
- 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.
- That on 10 September 2024, Crawley's Labour MP voted against the proposal put forward by the Conservatives in parliament, that sought to stop the Winter Fuel Allowance being scrapped for over ten million pensioners.

### **This 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 pensioners in Crawley 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, without any impact assessment, 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.
- That the government should take ownership of this decision to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance, and not blame the previous government, given that this decision is a political choice that is not driven by the health of the public finances that the current government inherited, noting that additional funding has been found for some recent public-sector pay awards that are much higher than inflation.

**This Council resolves to:**

- Instruct the Leader of the Council, on behalf on the Council, to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to:
  - i. seek an urgent review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment.
  - ii. ask the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
  - iii. request that she accepts full responsibility for her decision and stops publicly blaming the previous government and the inherited public finances for her decision, when she is making other political decisions that put pressure on the public finances.
- Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible for Pension Credit which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.
- 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 Crawley are supported in claiming their entitlement.