

## Proposed amendment to Motion - Winter Fuel Allowance

This Authority notes:

- The recent announcement by theThe Labour Government has made the difficult decision to end universal means test Winter Fuel Payments. This means that and restrict eligibility they will only continue to be received by to only those in receipt of Pension Credit and other benefits.
- The significant public concern about the impact of this change. Rising cost of living pressures have taken their toll in recent years, especially given the context of the numbers of older people left in a financially challenging and vulnerable position by the actions and management of the economy by the previous Conservative government. Government modelling estimates that the level of fuel poverty in 2024 will be 12.7%<sup>1</sup>, whilst some estimates place the number of single pensioner households living in poverty between 20 and 23%. Age UK has suggested that at least 1.6 million pensioners living in poverty are not claiming eligible benefits, of which 1 million may currently be entitled to qualifying benefits but not claiming them<sup>2</sup>. . The position for our older residents is stark.

---

• Though many agree that universal Winter Fuel Payments are not necessary, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (GPCA) 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 (from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million). Age UK research suggests 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

• Many pensioners who would be eligible for pension credit do not currently claim it. Research suggests that this is both because potential claimants are unaware that they are eligible and, to a lesser but significant extent, because they can feel uncomfortable in claiming benefits.

• The Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which makes it even more important that all residents are able to access all possible support available to them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Government fuel poverty statistics published 13th Sept 2024 (The statistic is projected to be broadly the same with or without means testing as a result of other changes, such as the changes to the state pension)

<sup>2</sup> Age UK press release 10th Sept 2024

• While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance:

This Authority further notes:

- The financial shock experienced as a result of the disastrous Truss-Kwarteng mini-budget, and the significant budgetary pressures imposed on the incoming Labour Government as a result of the serial mismanagement of the UK economy, best characterised by that budget, And especially the £22bn black hole in our nation's finances, which is the context for the current chancellor's decision.

- The Government's commitment to the pensions triple lock, which is expected to deliver an increase of approximately £400 for those on the full new state pension.

- The continuation of the £150 Warm Home Discount for low-income households from October and the extension of the Household Support Fund with £421 million, which can be used to ensure local authorities can support vulnerable people and families.

- The low take up of Pension Credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving it – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. This Authority recognises the role we all have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people get access to the support they are entitled to.

- It is vital, therefore, that we all make every effort to help eligible pensioners claim pension credit and other allowances they may be entitled to both highlighting eligibility as well as challenging concerns around claiming entitlements.

• In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the number of pensioners affected by the change in eligibility criteria is 138,176 who will no longer be able to claim the payment from this winter onwards, many of whom will face a 'heat or eat' dilemma and significant risks to their health as a result of this decision:

• The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures will negatively affect the health and well-being of some of our poorest older residents. Further, 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.

• 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. This is significantly lower than the Living Wage.

~~• The Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined with the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.~~

This Authority resolves to:

- ~~• Urgently commence a significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pension credits, including when available using the Low-Income Families Tracker (LIFT) to identify those who are eligible.~~
- Publicly support and endorse the work of *our relevant constituent councils* in their awareness campaigns to maximise uptake of pension credits, encouraging them all to use the Low-Income Families Tracker (LIFT) to identify those who are eligible.
- ~~• Request that the Mayor and all Board Members sign a joint 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 as part of its Warm Homes Plan, as well as considering what support can be given to help people reduce their energy bills and consumption.
- Commit the Authority to working collaboratively across in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to support residents during the cost of living crisis, as has recently happened in the Transport and Infrastructure Committee's decision to extend of free travel for those with concessionary bus passes into peak hours from May 2025.
- ~~• Commit the Authority to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all constituent council members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.~~
- Encourage local efforts to promote, as the government has advised, Pension Credit uptake through constituent council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are supported in claiming their entitlement, ~~and~~ to be clear that there is no stigma in being in receipt of means-tested benefits.