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Adults and Health Committee

20th January 2025

Response to Notice of Motion – Winter Fuel Allowance

Report of: Helen Charlesworth May, Executive Director, Adults, Health and Integration

Report Reference No: AH/23/2024-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to respond to the [Notice Of Motion raised at Full Council on 16th October 2024](#):

This Council is dismayed at the Labour Government's recent decision, in the absence of a full impact assessment, to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only those pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or similar benefit, with immediate effect this winter.

This means that many vulnerable Cheshire East pensioners this year, will lose between £200 and £300, dependent on circumstances, that they have relied upon to keep their homes warm and hot food prepared.

Nationally, Age UK has identified that up to two million pensioners who badly need this money, will now not receive it.

In addition, as many as 800,000 pensioners who are eligible for Pension Credit, do not claim it and will therefore remain ineligible for the Winter Fuel Allowance. As elected members, we have already received letters of concern from affected, older residents, including, for example, a petition from fifty members of the Congleton Widows Group.

Vulnerable Cheshire East Pensioners on limited means, but either not claiming Pension Credit or with incomes just above the Pension Credit threshold, will face desperate choices this winter; to "heat or eat" - decisions that pose a significant threat to health and life.

This Council therefore resolves:

- That Group Leaders write jointly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, expressing this Council's deep concerns regarding the impact of this decision on Cheshire East's most vulnerable residents and asking that the Winter Fuel Allowance is reinstated with immediate effect. This to remain in place, pending the results of a full impact assessment and the evaluation of an alternative scheme that will protect the most vulnerable and middle-income pensioners at risk during Winter months.
- To bring forward a refreshed Council-led, local awareness campaign, via digital, targeted mail and via related services and venues (for example; GP surgeries, Community facilities, places of worship), to support all those eligible, to apply for Pension Credit, before 21st December 2024. This date is critical if they are to register for Winter Fuel Allowance this Winter and so avoid fuel poverty.
- That the Leader and Deputy Leader of Council write to all Members of Parliament representing Cheshire East constituencies, explaining this Council's concerns and to request their support in raising them in Westminster, on behalf of Cheshire East's most vulnerable pensioners. Age UK responds to the Chancellor's announcement to means test the Winter Fuel Payment.

Executive Summary

- 2 The UK government has revised the Winter Fuel Payment for 2024/2025, limiting it to pensioners receiving Pension Credit or similar benefits. This change will affect some pensioners in Cheshire East, who will no longer be eligible to claim the payment, which ranges from £200 to £300 dependent on individual circumstances.
- 3 People must claim Pension Credit in order to be eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Allowance. The recommendations of this report respond to the [Notice Of Motion raised at Full Council on 16th October 2024](#) and informs of the Council's local awareness campaign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adults and Health Committee is recommended to:

1. Ask group leaders, to write jointly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, expressing this Council's concerns regarding the impact of this decision on Cheshire East residents and asking that the Winter Fuel Allowance is reinstated with immediate effect.

2. Note the Council's local awareness campaign, to support all those eligible, to apply for Pension Credit, before 21st December 2024 so they are able to receive the Winter Fuel Allowance this Winter.
3. Ask the Leader and Deputy Leader of Council write to all Members of Parliament representing Cheshire East constituencies, explaining this Council's concerns and to request their support in raising them in Westminster, on behalf of Cheshire East pensioners.

Background

- 4 The UK government has made changes to the Winter Fuel Payment for 2024/2025 which restricts the Winter Fuel Payment to those pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or similar benefit, with immediate effect this winter.
- 5 Some Cheshire East pensioners will no longer be eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Payment which ranges from £200 to £300, dependent on individual circumstances. Nationally, Age UK has identified up to 800,000 pensioners who are eligible for Pension Credit, do not claim it and will therefore remain ineligible for the Winter Fuel Allowance.
- 6 Cheshire East Council runs an awareness campaign which has helped to address the changes to Winter Fuel Payments. There are a number of local components that make up the programme, which are detailed in the table of appendix 1. Examples include the Household Support Fund, Cost of Living Community Response Grants and webpages, Affordable Warm Grants and a proactive support to assist take up with possible pension credit clients.
- 7 The Council took a targeted approach aiming to increase winter fuel payment eligibility, by proactively contacting potential claimants using the Council's benefit database. The Council has contacted customers directly, carrying out a Pension Credit check and then supporting them to claim Pension Credit if relevant.
- 8 To date, we have proactively contacted 1027 residents regarding Pension Credit, 239 were possibly eligible for Pension Credit following the check, 39 requested help to claim, 13 cases have had Pension Credit confirmed so far. We are aware that the Pension Service have over a six week delay on claims, and this is rising due to the influx of claims being made.
- 9 We had 3270 Pensioner Council Tax Support claims, 1375 claims with income over the Pension Credit threshold have not been contacted. We have targeted those who may qualify.

Consultation and Engagement

- 10 Not applicable - the purpose of this report respond to the [Notice Of Motion raised at Full Council on 16th October 2024](#) which made observations regarding the impact of the Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to those pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or similar benefit, with immediate effect this winter.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 11 The reason for the recommendations that are outlined in section 2 and 3 of this report is to respond to the Notice of Motion raised at Full Council on 16th October 2024 which made observations regarding the impact of the Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to those pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or similar benefit, with immediate effect this winter.
- 12 The recommendations also highlight the awareness campaign to support those eligible, to apply for Pension Credit, before the deadline of 21st December 2024 so they are able to receive the Winter Fuel Allowance this Winter.

Other Options Considered

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Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Older people who may potentially be eligible for further support, miss out on payments which could have been claimed.	Older people may be unaware of support available in their local communities and may be unaware of which benefits they're entitled to.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 14 Minute 52 Notices of Motion of the meeting of the Council on Wednesday 16th October recorded that Motion 1 Winter Fuel Allowance which had been submitted in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules be referred to the Adults and Health Committee for consideration. Committee and sub- committee Procedure Rules 2.39 and 2.40 Chapter 3- Part 1: Section 2 sets out the relevant procedural rules at Committee.
- 15 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 16 Notice of motion is being discussed at Adults and Health committee in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules be referred to the Adults and Health Committee for consideration. Committee and sub- committee Procedure Rules 2.39 and 2.40 Chapter 3- Part 1: Section 2 sets out the relevant procedural rules at Committee and has no direct impact on the MTFS.
- 17 The awareness campaign's activity has been funded by the Council's existing financial resources, resulting in no additional cost.

Policy

- 18 Notice of motion is being discussed at Adults and Health committee in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules be referred to the Adults and Health Committee for consideration. Committee and sub- committee Procedure

Rules 2.39 and 2.40 Chapter 3- Part 1: Section 2 sets out the relevant procedural rules at Committee

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 19 Advice and support has been targeted at pensioners that could be impacted by the change in Winter Fuel Payments and towards those pensioners that may be eligible to claim pension credit and receive the winter fuel payments.

Human Resources

- 20 No implications, notice of motion is being discussed at Adults and Health committee in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules.

Risk Management

- 21 There is a risk that older people may be unaware of support available in their local communities and may be unaware of which benefits they're entitled to which could result in older people who may potentially be eligible for further support, missing out on payments which could have been claimed.

Rural Communities

- 22 None, notice of motion is being discussed at Adults and Health committee in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 23 No impact on Children, Young people including Cared for Children and Children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Public Health

- 24 Raising awareness of the changes in Winter Fuel Allowance and of benefits available to pensioners will have a positive overall impact on the health and wellbeing of older Cheshire East residents.

Climate Change

- 25 No direct impact on climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Dan Coyne, Head of Service, Communities and Integration</p> <p>Daniel.Coyne@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Lynsey Cooper, Senior Community Development Officer</p> <p>Lynsey.cooper@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Components of Cheshire East Awareness Campaign
Background Papers:	<p>Notices of Motion – Council, 16th October 2024</p> <p>Winter Fuel Payment Overview</p> <p>The Council's Constitution, Chapter 3 – Rules of Procedure</p>

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Appendix 1 - Components of Cheshire East Awareness Campaign

Intervention	Details	Website link
Affordable Warmth Grant	<p>Grant for up to 75% of the cost of work, up to £2,000, for urgent heating improvements (such as boiler repairs, replacement boilers or new heating appliances). To qualify, you must be a homeowner living in the property, have a gross household income of no more than £31,000 and savings of no more than £23,250.</p> <p>This grant is also available to owner occupiers needing urgent heating to be able to come home from hospital.</p>	Help with heating your home
Cost of Living Community Response Grants	<p>64 grants awarded to Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector organisations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the VCFSE sector in Cheshire East by helping them to recover from the Cost-of-Living impact by thinking how they may make efficiencies whilst also responding to the needs of their beneficiaries. • Support the VCFSE sector to develop sustainable food solutions and long-term support to reduce the dependence on food banks. • Enable those adversely impacted by the Cost of Living to access the right help and support at the right time. <p>There have been 23,852 service uses to date.</p> <p>Examples of outcomes achieved include:</p> <p>Older people have been supported to safely access the internet, to arrange online deals with energy providers and search for best deals on various financial dealings and services.</p> <p>Increased wellbeing, improved social networks, and new skill development</p>	Grant funded projects

	<p>Signposting for participants - helping them to access the appropriate services to alleviate their worries and concerns.</p> <p>Low-cost, high-quality food provided via a community supermarket where people are able to take home a wide variety of groceries (worth circa £30) for a £5 donation.</p>	
Cost of Living Webpages	<p>Comprehensive source of information about support available, captured on one webpage.</p> <p>16,572 page visits in the past 12 months.</p> <p>Anticipated outcome is that residents are well informed of services in place that can help to alleviate some of the pressures of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.</p>	https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/education-employment-and-money/money-matters/cost-of-living.aspx
ECO and ECO Flexible Eligibility	<p>Major gas and electricity suppliers have to provide funding towards energy efficiency such as heating or insulation; those in receipt of welfare benefits you may qualify for help.</p> <p>ECO Flex Funding is available through ECO for people who don't receive one of the qualifying benefits but does meet the criteria in Cheshire East's Flexible Eligibility Statement of Intent.</p>	Help with heating your home
Energy Outreach Project	<p>Funded nationally by Citizens Advice, the Energy Outreach Project is a collaboration of locally delivered advice projects, spanning England and Wales. The project starts each year in summer and runs through to the end of March. Local organisations can deliver an "Energy Champion" project, and/or a "Regional Energy Lead" project, each contributing to the national targets, in different ways.</p>	Energy Outreach Project 2024-25 Energy Projects Plus
Gas Safe Charity	<p>Small grants of up to £200 are available if you are concerned about gas safety in your home.</p>	Help with heating your home
Home Upgrade Grant	<p>Warm Homes Local Grant scheme will be delivered from April 2025, subject to government funding.</p>	Help with heating your home

	Warm Homes Local Grants will be available for homes which have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) that is Band D, E, F or G.	
Household Support Fund	<p>An extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) was announced by the UK government on 02 September 2024. The fund covers the period from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.</p> <p>In Cheshire East, the HSF grant provides crisis support to financially vulnerable households most in need. The fund is also available to support those adults and families who are struggling to afford household basics including food, energy, and wider essentials.</p> <p>A range of support is available to help financially vulnerable adults, children and their families living in Cheshire East:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and energy support • Support for household essentials covering white goods, bedding and basic refurbished furniture items (if available) • Exceptional cost support 	Household Support Fund
Local Energy Advice Project	LEAP offers free Home Energy Visits or in-depth advice calls to people who are vulnerable to living in a cold home.	LEAP Energy Projects Plus
Private Rented Sector housing standards	<p>If you rent your home from a private landlord and you are unhappy about disrepair or the condition of the property, we can:</p> <p>give you advice about how to resolve the issues with your landlord</p> <p>inspect your home and rate any hazards using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System</p> <p>liaise with your landlord to get the repairs carried out</p> <p>take enforcement action to get the repairs carried out</p>	Housing standards
Proactive take up with possible PCG clients	To date, we have proactively contacted 1027 residents regarding Pension Credit, 239 were possibly eligible for Pension Credit following the check, 39 requested help to claim, 13 cases have had Pension Credit confirmed so far. We are aware that the Pension Service have an over 6-	Benefits

	<p>week delay on claims, and this is rising due to the influx of claims being made.</p> <p>We had 3270 Pensioner Council Tax Support claims, 1375 claims with income over the Pension Credit threshold have not been contacted. We have targeted those who may qualify and aim to contact another 100 before the 21.12.24.</p>	
Save Energy Advice Line	<p>Save Energy Advice Line (SEAL), offers free and impartial energy efficiency advice to residents across Cheshire & Merseyside.</p> <p>A team of qualified energy efficiency advisors offer advice on domestic energy efficiency and renewable energy.</p>	Save Energy Advice Line Energy Projects Plus
Supporting Community Wellbeing Fund	<p>14 grants awarded to Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector organisations to</p> <p>To allow organisations to recruit, co-ordinate and train volunteers who are supporting vulnerable residents to stay in their own homes, in the community, that will in turn reduce health inequalities and the demand in social care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase the number of organisations that can match volunteers to vulnerable people needing support in their communities. • To support vulnerable individuals that are discharged from hospital to rehabilitate in their own home. • To provide accessible and affordable transport to services and appointments for vulnerable people, across all areas of Cheshire East that creates a diverse community transport offer that gives options for individuals with different circumstances. • Support the VCFSE sector to develop sustainable food solutions and long-term support to reduce the dependence on food banks. • Enable those adversely impacted by the Cost of Living to access the right help and support at the right time. 	Grant funded projects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To allow organisations to manage their basic governance, risk and compliance processes, utilising software licences and/or systems (applications can be made for up to £500 for this objective) 	
Warm Places	<p>32 (to date) registered Warm Places including CE Libraries</p> <p>By signing up to the Warm Places Charter, organisations agree to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a warm and welcoming space for the community Treating everyone equally, with dignity and respect Ensuring your Warm Place is a safe place at all times Not disclosing any personal information regarding anyone who uses your services or attends your Warm Place Not judging anyone on the circumstances on why they require your services 	Warm places - keeping Cheshire East warm
Warmth 4 Health	<p>Through funding from Cadent Foundation, the Warmth 4 Health project covers all of Cheshire and Merseyside with advice and support for residents whose homes might be contributing to their ongoing ill-health.</p> <p>The continuing Cost of Living Crisis is causing millions of households to underheat their homes. Unfortunately, while this can help keep bills low, cold spots in underheated rooms can attract condensation.</p> <p>A specialist team of qualified Energy Advisors are trained to diagnose likely causes of condensation, damp, and mould, and provide recommendations to the resident.</p>	Warmth 4 Health Energy Projects Plus
Winter Wellbeing allocation of items	Items available for vulnerable persons from CE libraries such as hats, gloves, socks, thermal underwear, duvets, hot water bottles.	NA

	Referrals can be made via CE Local Area Co-ordinators, community development officers, homelessness teams.	
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