

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSERVATIVES

Press Release

Ref: PR/HCC/24-10a

Date: Friday 4th October 2024

Subject: “You don’t fill a ‘black hole’ by throwing pensioners into it!”

Hampshire County Council overwhelmingly backs Conservative condemnation of Winter Fuel Allowance cut.

Hampshire County Councillors have overwhelmingly backed a call for the Government to rethink their cut to Winter Fuel Allowance for the vast majority of pensioners.

Backing a motion brought to yesterday’s County Council meeting by Cllr Debbie Curnow-Ford, councillors supported writing to the Chancellor 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.

Introducing the motion, Cllr Curnow Ford said; “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. The Government’s approach leaves many without the support they desperately need.”

Councillors also agreed to sign Age UK’s ‘Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners’ petition, support a campaign to encourage sign up to Pension Credit and made a commitment that all Hampshire Libraries be designed warm hubs this winter.

Welcoming the move, including an opposition amendment to request an extension to the Household Support Fund into 2025/6, Council Leader Cllr Nick Adams-King said “We’ll do all we can to support those pensioners most affected by this heartless cut. The Government have introduced a means tested system with little thought for where the line is drawn, condemning many thousands of Hampshire pensioners to fuel poverty this winter.”

Referring to the Chancellor’s claim of a £22billion deficit in public finances, Cllr Adams-King said “You don’t fill a ‘black hole’ by throwing pensioners into it!”

Ends.

Notes:

Council resolved to:

The Labour Government has recently made the decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits.

According to Age UK, the estimated impact of this decision will mean 2 million pensioners, who badly need the money to stay warm this winter, will not receive it.

Winter Fuel Payments play a significant role in helping older residents of Hampshire, and across the UK, afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.

Criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities highlights the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.

This decision will place additional strain on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

It is recognised 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 thousands across Hampshire 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.

This 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 Council Leader 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.
- Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and to encourage all members 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 Hampshire are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- Make the commitment that all Hampshire County Council Libraries are designated under the warm spaces scheme for the winter of 2024/2025