



COUNCIL MEETING

19 September 2024

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Welsh will move the following motion:

Council notes the recent announcement by the Government to end universal Winter Fuel Payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other means-tested benefits.

Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower 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).

In Gateshead the number of pensioners affected by the change in eligibility criteria is 31,105, according to official Government figures. DWP statistics for winter 2022-2023 shows that 36,931 people in Gateshead received the payment last year. That means 84.2% of Gateshead pensioners currently eligible for Winter Fuel Payments will no longer be able to claim the payment. Gateshead is the 47th most deprived local authority in England in the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, and the sudden withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Payment will leave many of our residents facing serious hardship over the winter.

Council believes that the 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 for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to.

Council further notes that 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.

Although the Council and other local organisations have provided support in the form of Warm Spaces and similar initiatives, by nature these cannot be enough to cover the shortfall.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused, and for a more generous threshold for Winter Fuel Payments to be introduced. Council further requests the Chief Executive write

to all MPs covering Gateshead to ask them to give their formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.

- Request the Council and Opposition Leaders to sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.
- Urgently increase the existing work by Council Officers to maximise uptake of Pension Credits and other benefits. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and targeted letters to those who may be eligible.

Proposed by: Councillor Welsh

Seconded by: Councillor Ord

Supported by: Councillor Beadle
Councillor Patterson
Councillor Diston
Councillor Wintcher