

Winter Fuel Allowance

Proposer: Cllr Seema Chandwani

Seconder: Cllr Cathy Brennan

Council notes:

- 14 years of austerity has left the UK economy, public sector finances and welfare state under severe financial pressure;
- The Labour Government has changed the criterion for eligibility Winter Fuel Payments to those on means-tested benefits (primarily Pension Credit);
- Pension Credit is one of the most underclaimed benefits with 37% of those eligible do not claim pension credit, and 780,000 pensioners earning below £11,400 per year will no longer receive the Winter Fuel Payment;
- Since February 2023, Haringey has worked with the Labour Mayor of London to increase uptake of Pension Credits through the GLA's Pension Credits Programme;
- Together with 23 London boroughs, we have worked to ensure older Londoners do not miss out on receiving all of their Pension Credit. Since then, more than 4,300 Londoners have claimed Pension Credit they are entitled to, resulting in £17.9m in direct additional annual income.
- To receive Pension Credit a single pensioner must have an income of less than £11,343.80 per year, compared with a full-time living wage salary of £20,820.8 per year;
- Data from Policy in Practice shows that almost £17 million of pension credit goes unclaimed in Haringey each year, affecting over 4000 households;
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Last year, Haringey identified around 823 pensioners who were eligible for Pension Credits, with 154 pensioners claiming it. This resulted in a take up of £615,062 a year, which will result in £7,439,488 pension credits being taken up over an average lifetime.

This year, Haringey officers have identified 815 eligible residents not claiming pension credit in the borough and has been targeting them to supporting them in uptake

Last week, letters were sent to all eligible residents and we will be in contact with them to help support take up.

- 4 out 5 pensioners due to lose the Winter Fuel Payment are on or below the poverty line according to Age UK;
- The Energy Price Cap has risen by 10% in October, which, combined with restricted eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments, will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty;
- That it will use the Household Support Fund to provide payments to pensioners who are low income and eligible for Pension Credits and confirmed its plans to provide a payment from the council to 2,804 pension aged households claiming council tax reduction scheme.

Council believes:

- That ensuring that all those entitle to Pension Credits and other benefits are aware of their eligibility and are claiming them is a priority;
- Local government sector urgently needs a fairer funding settlement so it can continue to support all residents and transform Haringey into a fairer, greener borough;

Following this winter, there should be a review into the impact on the new means tested criteria for the Winter Fuel Allowance and will fully support the UK Government in a review or consultation should one take place.

Council resolves:

- To continue with it's plan to use the Household Support Fund to provide a payment from the council to pension aged households claiming from the council tax reduction scheme;
- To continue to work with the Mayor of London in helping identify and supporting residents to claim the benefits they are entitled to;
- To examine what support can be provided to these same households in future years;
- To support the Mayor of London's comms campaign. encourage greater uptake of Pension Credits by those who are entitled to them;

To instruct the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to write to Haringey's Members of Parliament, to set out why a fairer funding settlement is vital for local authorities to continue to support residents and transform Haringey into a fairer and greener borough.