



11 September 2024

Dear residents

I want to take the time to explain to you why I voted with the Government on the issue of the Winter Fuel Allowance, as well as setting out the support that is available for pensioners this winter.

No-one wants to be in this position. We have only had winter fuel payments for the last 25 years because a Labour Government brought them in and I wish that it was possible to keep the Winter Fuel Allowance as a universal benefit.

Work is being undertaken locally to protect the payment for as many people as possible. Important information about support and eligibility is contained in this letter, but it is also important to talk about how we ended up in this situation.

#### Support for pensioners

I would like to assure you that the new Government is taking steps to support pensioners, despite the UK's very difficult financial situation, including:

- Maintaining the Triple Lock so that the value of the State Pension is protected. The annual New State Pension will rise by **£460** in April. The Basic State Pension will rise by **£353.60** a week. As the BBC has noted, this increase is 'much higher than inflation.'
- Extending the Household Support Fund – in Birmingham, this Fund has supported grants of up to £200 for households in hardship. I have written to the Council to ask them to set out the support they will provide, now that this fund has been extended.
- Providing the Warm Home Discount worth £150 off electricity bills this winter for millions of low-income households, including pensioners'.
- Maintaining the Cold Weather Payment if this is an unusually cold winter (worth £175 a week for each consecutive 7 days that the temperature drops below zero).

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- Preserving the Winter Fuel Allowance for people in receipt of Pension Credit and certain other benefits (Universal Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax or Working Tax Credit.)

### Pension Credit eligibility

If you are in receipt of Pension Credit or certain other benefits then you will continue to get the Winter Fuel Allowance.

Many people are eligible to receive Pension Credit but do not claim it. Some 2,600 households in the Northfield constituency meet the criteria but they do not receive the payments and are out-of-pocket. Pension Credit is also a gateway to other forms of support, including the free over-75 TV licence and boiler replacement funding.

The eligibility criteria for Pension Credit extend to disability status and people with caring responsibilities. If you think that you (or people you know) may be eligible then I urge you to take the following steps:

- Phone this DWP number – 0800 99 1234. You can also apply online at: <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit>
- If you need support with an application then you can consult the Independent Age national helpline on 0800 319 6789.

If the Winter Fuel Payment is going to be means tested we need to make sure that as many people who are eligible to continue to receive the payment can do so. I am trying to make sure that it reaches as many people as possible and I have been in contact with Independent Age, the UK's only national charity that focuses exclusively on pensioner poverty, to discuss campaigns to reduce costs for pensioners.

Ministers have also given me an assurance that they working urgently to simplify the application process for Pension Credit, as well as looking to write to all pensioner households in receipt of housing benefits, as they may be eligible for Pension Credit.

### The Public Finances

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The reality is that the last government, as it fell behind in the polls, made ever grander promises in the hope of winning a few votes back. As the Office for Budget Responsibility has confirmed, the financial reality was hidden from Parliament and the public until after the election. For example, immigration and asylum was over-spent more than £7 billion this year – several times the entire cost of winter fuel payments.

Urgent action was needed to repair the public finances. Without immediate steps, the cost of government borrowing would have risen and more benefits and services would have to be cut down the line. Not acting could have led to higher prices, mortgages and rents. I can only convey my anger at this situation, and assure you that the new Government will not act in this manner with the public finances.

We can never go back to the days when reckless spending crashed the housing market, punishing pensioners who didn't own their homes outright more than most. We know that Conservative Ministers looked at cuts to the Winter Fuel Allowance last year. Had they won the election then it is likely that pensioner benefits would have been reduced due to the scale of the hidden liability.

We are also acting to raise money from those with the broadest shoulders, including by cracking down on wealthy non-UK nationals who have been exempted from tax, and by levying the windfall profits of the energy companies.

I understand that it might look like pensioners were singled out because of the timing of the announcement, but as winter approaches there was – I think – some benefit in people being given as much time as possible to prepare.

I will continue to work hard in representing all of my constituents, ensuring that we bring about economic stability, restore our public services, and protect ordinary people during this difficult time.

Yours sincerely

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Member of Parliament for Birmingham Northfield

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