

## Motion, funding for drop-in centres for older residents

On the 8th July 2024, Chancellor Rachel Reeves delivered her budget statement. This statement included removing the winter fuel payments from all pension age residents other than those on pension credit.

Age UK claim that millions of struggling pensioners will no longer receive up to £300 winter fuel payments which they rely on to pay their bills. They believe that as many as 2 million pensioners who find paying their energy bills a real stretch will be seriously hit by this cut, which includes:

- Those on low incomes who just miss out on Pension Credit,
- Those with high energy needs because of disability or illness,
- The 1 million who do not receive the Pension Credit for which they are eligible.

According to the Guardian Deven Ghelani, the founder of Policy in Practice and one of the architects of the universal credit system, claimed that cliff edges in the benefit system are a growing problem. Whilst recognising that pension credit can unlock access to housing benefit and council tax support and social tariffs including the warm home discount and now winter fuel payments, they recognised that about 130,000 pensioners might be better off with a lower income.

The Council has a duty of care for all its residents and since it appears that many older residents are missing out on payments that they are entitled to the Council needs to find ways of ensuring that older residents are aware of available help towards their cost of living. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2020 46% of all residents over the age of 75 were not internet users, therefore although much of the information may be available online a significant number of older residents will not be able to access it. Although under disability access guidelines organisations are required to make sure information is available in alternative formats other than online, there needs to be a way of making residents aware of its availability and to make it easy for residents to obtain hard copies of any forms.

Some residents may find the completion of the pension credit form challenging since the form itself is 24 pages long with an additional 24 pages of notes on how to complete the form. Although the Government website does inform residents that they can get help from organisations such as Age UK and Citizens Advice it requires residents to go to their pages to find out about accessing that help.

Winter can be a much more challenging time for elderly residents, with shorter days and longer nights, residents are likely to spend more time in their homes. The Alzheimer's Society claims that social isolation can lead to an increased risk of developing dementia relating to if a person lives alone, and whether they see friends and family regularly or engage in social or community activities. They separate social isolation from loneliness, which they define as how someone feels about their circumstances. Loneliness has been linked to increased dementia risk.

They also identify other dementia risks including cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity often linked to sedentary lifestyles. While the Council offers advice delivered by the Older People's Staying Well Team many residents are not aware of this service or how to access advice.

[Amend] Several community organisations have been delivering drop in warming hubs for older residents, **many with support from the Council.** [Remove] ~~but these hubs could offer~~

~~much more with support from the Council. Like other businesses, community centres and churches are feeling the impact of increased energy prices and consequently they are struggling to offer the same amount of freely available community access.~~

Several food banks and food pantries offer drop-in advice sessions alongside food provision to help those in our society who need additional help, we envisage that a similar service could help older residents access the payments they are entitled to.

[Remove] This Council resolves to:

- ~~• Work with community organisations and churches throughout Bury MBC to provide funding to cover the costs of hosting warming hub drop-ins for residents seeking either a warm space or advice on available help~~
- ~~• Invite organisations such as Age UK and CAB (or an alternative Council employee) to attend these drop-ins to provide help and advice regarding eligibility and completion of forms for pension credit, attendance allowance, council tax relief, carers allowance etc~~
- ~~• Work to engage the PCN that does not currently fund the staying well service with a view to bringing the 8 GP Practices in Bury not currently eligible into the scheme.~~
- ~~• Arrange for the Older People's Staying Well Team to attend these drop-in sessions on a rotational basis to give advice on healthy living and available groups and classes for physical exercise and social activities~~
- ~~• Fund Calico to attend the sessions to provide help to residents in the private rental sector seeking advice~~
- ~~• Council to provide, as part of the Government sanctioned Pension Credit Awareness scheme, for a dedicated employee to send a letter to all residents over the age of 66 years to inform them of the deadline of 21st December 2024, for submitting a claim for Pension Credit in order that they may receive the full three months of backdated benefits~~

[Add in] This Council resolves to:

- Hold a further Anti-Poverty Summit to draw together our borough's anti-poverty partnership and co-produce an action plan for how to utilise the extended Household Support Fund – including a specific focus on how we support our older residents during the winter months.
- Continue our work, as the Council and with our partners, to encourage and support foodbanks, community groups and other drop-ins with wrap around support for those who need additional help.
- Work with our PCNs and wider public service partnership to find a sustainable funding model for the Live Well and Staying Well provision.