

Dear Colleagues,

2025#1 Winter Fuel Payments

To participate in our survey on Winter Fuel Payments, please visit our Members' Hub. You will need to be signed in using your CPF profile. We would anticipate any group discussions to focus on question 6. Group Coordinators can submit any additional thoughts arising from their Group discussions via email to CPF.papers@conservatives.com

Please submit your responses to the survey questions using the form published on the CPF website. The deadline for sending your response is Sunday 9th February.

We look forward to hearing your views,

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Setting the scene

Around 10 million pensioners will lose out on winter fuel payments this winter because of Labour's decision to means-test the benefit, restricting it to those who qualify for pension credit. The Winter Fuel Payment is an annual payment of up to £300 to help with heating costs during the colder months. Winter fuel payments were created in 1997 to help everyone above state pension age with their winter heating bills. The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves announced that winter 2024 will be the first time that pensioners in England and Wales will not be eligible for the payment.¹

According to the government's own analysis, around 780,000 eligible pensioners in England and Wales are expected to lose their winter fuel allowance because they have not applied for benefits to which they are entitled.²

The number of retirees eligible to claim winter fuel payments is expected to fall even further - from 1,427,000 to 1,252,000 by the end of this Parliament - according to Department for Work and Pensions estimates.³

Ultimately, this is a healthcare issue. It has been estimated that GP visits for respiratory illness increase by up to 19% for every 1°C drop below 5°C in the mean temperature.⁴ In England and Wales, each 1°C reduction in winter temperature has been shown to correspond with a 2.1% increase in relative excess mortality—that is, an extra 3,500 deaths per °C fall in average temperature, approximately 2-in-10,000 of the population aged 45 years and over.⁵

It is believed that rural populations in certain regions of the country are at increased risk, particularly in more deprived areas.⁶ Houses in rural areas are on average significantly less energy efficient than those in residential, suburban or urban settings.⁷ In addition, households living in rural areas are more likely to be fuel poor and have an average fuel poverty gap over two times higher.⁸ Yet, access to healthcare in rural areas is often more limited, for instance because of larger distances to cover and poor connectivity of both transport and telecommunications.⁹

Winter fuel payments are devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have announced that they will be following the Labour Government's decision to restrict payments.¹⁰

Question for Group Discussion

6. What additional measures do you think Conservatives should campaign for to help deliver sustainable retirement incomes for the country's population?

[free text response]

References

- ¹ *Winter fuel payments scrapped for millions of pensioners*, 29 July 2024, BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx02zdd92zdo>
- ² *DWP Freedom of Information response*, 13 September 2024, DWP, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responses-to-freedom-of-information-requests-on-equality-impact-assessments-produced-for-targeting-winter-fuel-payment/dwp-freedom-of-information-response>
- ³ *175,000 more pensioners to lose winter fuel allowance under Labour*, 13 December 2024, Telegraph, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/retirement/175000-more-pensioners-lose-winter-fuel-allowance-labour/>
- ⁴ Hajat, S., Bird, W., & Haines, A. (2004) *Cold weather and GP consultations for respiratory conditions by elderly people in 16 locations in the UK*, *Eur J Epidemiol* 19(10):959-68
- ⁵ Laake, K. & Sverre, J.M. (1996) *Winter excess mortality: a comparison between Norway and England plus Wales*, *Age and Ageing* 25: 343–8
- ⁶ Hajat, S., Kovats, R.S. and Lachowycz, K. (2007) *Heat-related and cold-related deaths in England and Wales: who is at risk?*, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 64(2): 93–100
- ⁷ *Energy efficiency of UK homes*, 11 December 2024, House of Commons Library, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9889/>
- ⁸ *Annual fuel poverty statistics report: 2024*, 15 February 2024, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, pp.34-5, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2024>. N.B. Fewer than 45% of households in villages and 40% in hamlets are on mains gas, compared with over 90% of those in urban areas and over 80% in rural towns, while around 30% of households in villages and 40% in hamlets rely on oil and a further 20-25% in these settings on solid fuel or electricity for heating: *English House Condition Survey*, 2009, Department for Communities and Local Government. Type of fuel, however, has no additional impact other than that accounted for in the dwelling's SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) energy rating: *Cold And Poor: An analysis of the link between fuel poverty and low income*, 2008, New Policy Institute, p.88, https://www.npi.org.uk/files/2213/7536/2395/fuel_poverty.pdf
- ⁹ *Health care in rural areas*, 17 February 2023, House of Lords Library, <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/health-care-in-rural-areas/>
- ¹⁰ *Winter Fuel Payment*, 2024, NASUWT, <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/about-us/retired-member/winter-fuel-payment.html>