

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2024, AT 7.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Connolly (Chairman).
Councillors M Adams, D Andrews,
R Buckmaster, P Boylan, C Brittain,
M Butcher, I Devonshire, E Buckmaster,
S Bull, V Burt, R Carter, N Clements,
S Copley, B Crystall, A Daar, B Deering,
T Deffley, J Dumont, J Dunlop, Y Estop,
V Glover-Ward, M Goldspink, C Hart, G Hill,
A Holt, S Hopewell, C Horner, T Hoskin,
D Jacobs, S Marlow, G McAndrew,
S Nicholls, A Parsad-Wyatt, C Redfern,
T Stowe, M Swainston, J Thomas,
R Townsend, S Watson, D Willcocks,
G Williams, G Williamson and C Wilson.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Katie Mogan	- Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Helen Standen	- Interim Chief Executive

170 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said she had a busy summer of attending events across the District, including garden parties and a number of flag raising events for the emergency services and

Pride.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Bull back to the Chamber after his recent illness.

171 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader said that he had attended the second visioning workshop for the refresh of the District Plan which was key to ensure that the right kind of development was in place.

He congratulated the Environmental Health team who had received the Gold Level from the RSPCA for their work in animal activity licences. He also congratulated Ellen Tooley, who works for APCOA in Bishops Stortford as part of the parking services team, who was recently awarded the Front Line Award at the British Parking Awards.

The Leader said that DEFRA had recognised the council's Air Quality Action Plan as an example of best practice which had been published on the DEFRA website as an example to other council's to develop their own plans.

The Leader said that he had also attended the opening of Castle Park in Bishop's Stortford and the opening of BEAM in August. He thanked the officers involved in these projects and the previous administration who had led on these projects.

172 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cox, Hollebon, Smith, Woolcombe and Woolf.

173 MINUTES - 24 JULY 2024

Councillor E Buckmaster said that there was an error under minute number 109 – Local Government Funding. He said that the £6.2 billion funding gap was a national figure and not related to Hertfordshire County Council.

Councillor Horner proposed, and Councillor Hill seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meetings held on 24 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meetings held on 24 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

174 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that he had given a dispensation to all Members to take part in the motion on the Winter Fuel Allowance so they could debate freely.

175 FOLLY ISLAND PROPOSED REFUSE PLANS

Keeley Haylett presented the petition on the Folly Island proposed refuse plans.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability responded to the petition.

As the local ward councillor, Councillor Daar spoke in response to the petition. She said that Folly Island was a special part of the ward and said she recognised the concerns about the beauty of the area. She reiterated that the Executive were committed to finding a mutually agreeable solution whilst meeting the obligation from central government.

176 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Public Questions can be

found in the supplementary document [here](#).

177 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The full responses to the submitted Members Questions can be found in the supplementary document [here](#).

178 EXECUTIVE REPORT - 3 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Leader of the Council presented a report setting out recommendations to the Council made by the Executive at its meeting on 3 September 2024. He said that the Executive also met on 1 October 2024, but there were no recommendations to Council.

179 EAST HERTS COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND CHANGES TO THE LGSCO CODE OF PRACTICE

The Executive Member for Corporate Services presented the recommendation to Council. He said that there had been recent changes to the Complaint Handling Code by the Ombudsman to ensure that there was consistency and fairness in the complaint handling process across councils. He said that this new code had meant there needed to be amendments to the persistent and unreasonable behaviour policy.

Councillor Dumont proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Goldspink said she supported the recommendation and said she was glad that East Herts were open and transparent about their complaints process.

Councillor Deering said that the Conservative group supported the recommendation.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a

vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That the updated Persistent and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy be adopted.

180 EAST HERTS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the recommendations to Council. She said that the council, as the local planning authority, had to prepare a Local Development Scheme to set out a timeline to produce development plan documents. There was a new government consultation on proposed reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework and changes to the planning system which meant the new plan making process would be implemented from Summer 2025.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the timetable set out in the report may be subject to change as the scheme assumed that the relevant secondary legislation would be published in September 2025. She said that the council would continue to focus on updating the evidence base to support the District Plan review.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Copley seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering said that the Conservative group would be supporting the recommendations.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (a) the East Herts Local Development Scheme be agreed to take effect from October 2024; and
(b) the Local Development Scheme is published on the council's website.

181 APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND RETURNING OFFICER

The Leader of the Council presented the report to Council. He said that Richard Cassidy had made the decision to leave the council after five years and he thanked him for his service and leadership. He said that the process of appointing a successor was defined by the Constitution and the Chief Officer Recruitment Committee met on 19 September 2024 and unanimously agreed to appoint Helen Standen as Interim Chief Executive and Returning Officer. He said that the appointment needed to be ratified by Council.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Goldspink supported the comments from the Leader and said she was pleased to support the appointment.

Councillor Jacobs asked for clarification around the recommendation for making the appointment for 18 months.

Councillor Crystall said that there were currently challenges in recruitment for local authorities. He said that it was important to make the right appointment and have the flexibility for long notice periods for Chief Executives.

Councillor E Buckmaster said that the original recommendation to the Chief Officer Recruitment Committee suggested making the appointment for 18 months. He said that the committee agreed to amend to up to 18 months to ensure that the recruitment process was done as soon as possible.

Councillor Boylan said he supported the recommendations but asked about the backfilling of the Deputy Chief Executive role.

Councillor Crystall said he was looking at backfilling and there was some ideas already about how to do that.

Councillor Deering thanked Richard Cassidy for his service on behalf of the Conservative group. He congratulated Helen Standen on stepping up to take on this role. He said that he thought some consideration should be given to a shared Chief Executive with another local authority and hoped that the process would happen as soon as possible as and he looked forward to the next steps.

Councillor Crystall said everyone wanted certainty and said the recruitment process would have cross party involvement.

Councillor Daar said she was grateful that the Deputy Chief Executive was willing to step as and it would be settling for staff to have a familiar face through a time of change.

Councillor Dumont said making the right decision was important and not the speed at which the decision was made.

Councillor Deering said that the Section 151 Officer was retiring at the end of the year and said he would like to thank him for his service.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (A) the appointment of Helen Standen to the role of Interim Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service for a period of up to 18 months be ratified.

(b) Helen Standen be appointed as the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer for up to 18 months.

The Leader of the Council said that guidance states that councils should carry out a Community Governance Review every 10-15 years. He said that Council agreed at its last meeting to carry out a review and set up a working group to consider areas for review. He said that the review gave town and parish councils an opportunity to change and the report set out the terms of reference and timetable for the review.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Thomas seconded the proposal.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt referred to paragraph 2.6 of the report about Sawbridgeworth Town Council. He asked the nature of the consultation as there were specific references to the warding of Sawbridgeworth.

Councillor Carter asked how the consultation would work and where the weighting would lie for changing boundaries.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that it was difficult to pre-empt the consultation response and it would be for the working group to consider all responses and create draft recommendations.

Councillor E Buckmaster said that the Sawbridgeworth warding arrangements was an officer suggestion and said that Sawbridgeworth was a tight, urban area with a cohesive community. He said that the only benefit would be a shorter count. He said the community feeling was the most important consideration.

Councillor Boylan said that Sawbridgeworth did not appear in the terms of reference list and said the heading was misleading.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that the list in the terms of reference was those parish councils that had said they would like to be included in the review but the terms of reference did reference that the review would take place across the district.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review at Appendix A be agreed, signifying the formal start of the Review and commencement of the first stage consultation.

183 OFFICER DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECISIONS RELATING TO THE DELIVERY OF THE OLD RIVER LANE PROJECT.

The Leader of the Council presented the recommendation to Council. He said that the Council had previously delegated authority of the delivery of the Old River Lane project to the Head of Strategic Finance and Property at its meeting on 18 March 2021. He said that the current post holder was retiring at the end of November so the delegation needed to be updated. The report recommended that the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy be given delegated authority for this function.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Swainston seconded the proposal.

Councillor Estop said that she felt decisions relating to the Old River Lane project should be the responsibility of the Executive or the Delivery Board. She said that the delegated authority was not clear on the scope of powers and prompted concerns that the decision-making lacked transparency and accountability.

Councillor Goldspink said she was a member of the Old River Lane Delivery Board and said the Board had made efforts over the last 18 months to improve transparency by publishing its decisions and minutes on the council's website.

Councillor Jacobs felt the recommendation was unclear and wanted clarity as to how far the delegated authority went.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that no decision would be taken by the officer without consultation with the Old River Lane Delivery Board as per the recommendation.

Councillor E Buckmaster said it was common practice to delegate authority to officers.

Councillor Estop said the report did not set out the level of responsibility and said there had been a history of questionable decisions.

Councillor Dumont said that the terms of reference were linked in the report.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - To delegate to the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy, in consultation with the Old River Delivery Board operating in line with its Terms of Reference and the S151 Officer (or Deputy S151 in their absence), the authority to make decisions relating to the delivery of the Old River Lane project.

184 CHANGES TO THE WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE

Councillor Holt presented his motion on notice. Councillor Parsad-Wyatt seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Daar proposed the following amendments to the motion.

- To add as a fourth paragraph: "Whilst we recognise the new Labour led government's need to deal with the

debts inherited from the previous Conservative led administration, we feel the burden of paying for cuts should fall on the broadest shoulders not those of the most vulnerable. We urge the government to make up the shortfall in funding through a windfall tax on energy companies in the immediate term whilst other longer-term options are explored. Locally we have already seen the effects of austerity on the vulnerable and cannot support any extension of this approach. In addition, we oppose further rises in the energy price cap which affect the most vulnerable adversely.”

- To add under point 2 under ‘This Council Observes’:
“We also recognise that pensioners struggling with their heating bills will also be unable to afford upgrades to home insulation.”
- Add a new point 2 under ‘This Council Resolves to’:
“Call for the minister responsible for the environment: to support pensioners, by increasing funding for free home insulation schemes in order to make the winter fuel payments go further.”
- Add the words “not receiving Pension Credit’ after pensioners in point 3.
- To add under point 3 under ‘This Council Resolves to’:
We need to see a review of all possible ways of organising a better and fairer way of assessing the needs of pensioners for receipt of the Winter Fuel Payments. This would ensure that it is targeted so that all pensioners who need the payment would receive it, not just those on the lowest incomes.
- To add the words ‘environmental sustainability’ in the final paragraph.

Councillor Daar spoke to the amendment and said that she supported the motion fully but felt the fourth paragraph was an important addition for honesty and transparency. She felt that residents needed to have the context that has led to the

decision and poor choices from the previous and current government has impacted residents locally.

Councillor Horner seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor E Buckmaster said he supported the original motion. He said as a former Executive member, the council had provided £30 million to get funding out to community groups and small business. He said he was shocked by the move by the Labour government to remove the winter fuel allowance and said they had blamed it on difficult decisions. He said that there were no difficult decisions but there were options and felt the government had made the easy choice to take away from the most vulnerable who did not have the option to fight back. He said that he liked some of the amendments proposed but not all so he would be supporting the original motion.

Councillor Butcher said he supported the amendments proposed as it made important points.

Councillor Jacobs said that the Green/Liberal Democrat administration should recognise the challenges of inheriting a challenging position like the government had. He said that he knew the administration had not taken pleasure in cutting budgets and calling an extraordinary meeting to provide the theatre project with more money and reminded them that the Labour group voted with the administration on that issue. He said everyone recognised that the winter fuel allowance had played an important role in helping pensioners, but changes were being made to ensure that assistance was targeted to those that needed it the most.

Councillor Swainston sympathised with Councillor Jacobs' comments, but the amendment recognised that there needed to be a review of the winter fuel payments. She said she supported the amended motion.

Councillor Hart thanked Councillor Holt for bringing the original amendment. She pointed out the general narrow view

of a pensioner's income who have the burden of aging, ill health, and potential care costs. She felt the government had targeted a vulnerable population for an easy win.

Councillor Williams also thanked Councillor Holt for the original motion. He said he supported the amendment and said this was not a group that should be targeted.

Councillor Goldspink said she supported the amended motion. She said she understood that the government wanted to give the payment to those that really needed it but felt the financial limit for receipt of payment was set too low resulting in hardship for many vulnerable pensioners. She felt a fairer way to assess need must be found.

Councillor Devonshire said the application for pension credit was online and there was about 200 questions to answers which was too cumbersome for pensioners.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt welcomed support for the motion across the Chamber. He said he would have been happy to accept the majority of the amendments proposed but was not happy with the fourth paragraph. He said the original motion had been drafted to avoid reference to political parties and had tried to be constructive around what the council could do to support residents.

Councillor Glover-Ward said she thanked the Labour group for their support on previous issues faced by the administration. She said the amendment to point 2 was important to call on the Minister responsible to increase the funding for environmental heating schemes.

Councillor Wilson said that the Conservative group were talking about protecting vulnerable people without acknowledging the previous government's failure to protect other vulnerable groups. He said he agreed with the amended motion.

Councillor Horner responded to the points raised and said that the withdrawal of payment from the poorest pensioners was a

misstep from the government. He said it was a misguided decision that restricted those on the lowest incomes. He felt this would not realise the savings the government needed and urged all councillors to vote for the amended motion.

Having been proposed and seconded, the amended motion was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - This Council expresses deep concern regarding the Government's decision to amend the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) as outlined in the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations 2024, which were presented to Parliament on 22nd August 2024 and came into effect on 16th September 2024.

Under the new regulations, beginning in the winter of 2024/2025, households in England and Wales will only qualify for the Winter Fuel Payment if they are recipients of Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits specified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This change raises significant concerns, as the Government has not conducted a full impact assessment or initiated public consultation.

Age UK has estimated that 2 million pensioners who rely on this crucial support to stay warm during the winter months may be ineligible under the new criteria. Locally, in East Hertfordshire, 27,486 pensioners could lose access to this vital financial assistance, creating severe financial strain for many elderly residents and exacerbating existing health and wellbeing challenges, particularly for those just above the Pension Credit threshold.

Whilst we recognise the new Labour led government's need to deal with the debts inherited from the previous Conservative led administration, we feel the burden of paying for cuts should fall on the broadest shoulders not those of the most vulnerable. We urge the government to make up the shortfall in funding through a windfall tax on energy companies in the immediate term whilst other longer-term options are explored.

Locally we have already seen the effects of austerity on the vulnerable and cannot support any extension of this approach.

In addition, we oppose further rises in the energy price cap which affect the most vulnerable adversely.

This Council Observes:

1. Impact on Vulnerable Pensioners: The removal of the Winter Fuel Payment for pensioners not receiving Pension Credit or other designated benefits is likely to disproportionately impact vulnerable elderly residents, particularly those living in rural areas where access to services and support is already limited.

2. Rural Housing Challenges: Pensioners in rural areas often reside in older, less energy-efficient homes, with over 70% of rural properties in the UK built before 1980. These homes typically suffer from inadequate insulation and outdated heating systems, making them more costly and difficult to heat. We also recognise that pensioners struggling with their heating bills will also be unable to afford upgrades to home insulation.

3. Health Impacts of Cold Weather: Excess winter deaths (EWDs) remain a significant public health issue, with over 30,000 EWDs occurring in the UK each year, a majority of which affect older populations. Public Health England has reported a 1.5% increase in EWDs for each degree Celsius drop below 18°C, highlighting the vital need for sufficient home heating.

4. The Right to Warmth: Every pensioner should have the right to live in a warm and secure home. The decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment risks increasing cold-related illnesses and excess winter deaths among elderly residents who may not qualify for additional support despite being just above the Pension Credit threshold.

This Council Resolves to:

1. Oppose the Removal of Winter Fuel Payments: Strongly oppose the Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel

Payment to pensioners receiving Pension Credit or certain means-tested benefits and recognise the disproportionate negative impact this policy will have on some of our most vulnerable elderly residents, particularly in rural areas.

2. Call for the minister responsible for the environment:

to support pensioners, by increasing funding for free home insulation schemes in order to make the winter fuel payments go further.

3. Call for a Government Review: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a full review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment. The Council will advocate for ensuring that all pensioners, not receiving Pension Credit but still vulnerable to fuel poverty, continue to receive essential winter fuel support. We need to see a review of all possible ways of organising a better and fairer way of assessing the needs of pensioners for receipt of the Winter Fuel Payments. This would ensure that it is targeted so that all pensioners who need the payment would receive it, not just those on the lowest incomes.

4. Engage Local MPs: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the four Members of Parliament representing East Hertfordshire, urging them to lobby the Government for a reversal of this decision and to ensure protections are in place for vulnerable pensioners who are at risk of fuel poverty. This action is crucial given that 27,486 local pensioners may be affected by this change.

5. Promote Benefit Awareness: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to seek additional funding for a local outreach and awareness campaign. This campaign will aim to inform pensioners about their eligibility for Pension Credit and other related benefits, particularly targeting those who are eligible but not currently claiming. This effort is intended to ensure that no pensioner misses out

on support due to lack of awareness.

In summary, this Council believes the proposed changes to the Winter Fuel Payment system will cause undue hardship to many elderly residents in East Hertfordshire and calls on the Government to reconsider this decision in the interest of public health, financial stability, environmental sustainability and the wellbeing of our pensioners.

The Council then debated the substantive motion.

Councillor Redfern asked about the figure of 27,486 pensioners and she said she was not clear on whether that was the number of pensioners in East Herts or if it was the number of pensioners at the bottom of the income scale for pension credit.

Councillor Holt confirmed that it was the number of pensioners in East Herts previously eligible for the winter fuel allowance.

Councillor Hopewell said that Josh Dean MP had been doing a lot of work locally to help support pensioners and had worked with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor Hart reiterated that most pensioners fall in the lower income bracket and were not wealthy.

Councillor Butcher said that 3,850 pensioners could die in the winter directly because of this cut.

Councillor Deering said that he was pleased the Green/Liberal Democrat group agreed broadly with the motion. He made reference to the comment about the local MP and said that it was pertinent to remember that MPs were paid £91,000 a year and nearly all Labour MPs voted in favour of taking the allowance away. He said the Conservative group only disagreed with the additional paragraph because it insinuated that they were not supportive of pensioners. He said the group would be voting in favour of the substantive motion.

Councillor McAndrew said that the government were failing to process 1 in 5 claims within 50 working days. He said that

some pensioners would face uncertainty for ten weeks to see if they would qualify for the vital payment.

Councillor Estop said that the motion had become political and failed to add any context. She said there was a bigger picture of the most vulnerable in society such as child poverty and housing poverty.

Councillor Parsad-Wyatt said that despite his reservations on some of the amendment, he supported the majority if it. He said that the Labour group had chosen to talk about the previous government's choices, not their own government's choices now. He said if the motion was supported, it would send a clear signal that the Council supported its pensioners.

Having been proposed and seconded, the substantive motion was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - This Council expresses deep concern regarding the Government's decision to amend the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) as outlined in the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations 2024, which were presented to Parliament on 22nd August 2024 and came into effect on 16th September 2024.

Under the new regulations, beginning in the winter of 2024/2025, households in England and Wales will only qualify for the Winter Fuel Payment if they are recipients of Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits specified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This change raises significant concerns, as the Government has not conducted a full impact assessment or initiated public consultation.

Age UK has estimated that 2 million pensioners who rely on this crucial support to stay warm during the winter months may be ineligible under the new criteria. Locally, in East Hertfordshire, 27,486 pensioners could lose access to this vital financial assistance, creating severe financial strain for many elderly residents and exacerbating existing health and

wellbeing challenges, particularly for those just above the Pension Credit threshold.

Whilst we recognise the new Labour led government's need to deal with the debts inherited from the previous Conservative led administration we feel the burden of paying for cuts should fall on the broadest shoulders not those of the most vulnerable. We urge the government to make up the shortfall in funding through a windfall tax on energy companies in the immediate term whilst other longer-term options are explored. Locally we have already seen the effects of austerity on the vulnerable and cannot support any extension of this approach.

In addition, we oppose further rises in the energy price cap which affect the most vulnerable adversely.

This Council Observes:

1. Impact on Vulnerable Pensioners: The removal of the Winter Fuel Payment for pensioners not receiving Pension Credit or other designated benefits is likely to disproportionately impact vulnerable elderly residents, particularly those living in rural areas where access to services and support is already limited.

2. Rural Housing Challenges: Pensioners in rural areas often reside in older, less energy-efficient homes, with over 70% of rural properties in the UK built before 1980. These homes typically suffer from inadequate insulation and outdated heating systems, making them more costly and difficult to heat. We also recognise that pensioners struggling with their heating bills will also be unable to afford upgrades to home insulation.

3. Health Impacts of Cold Weather: Excess winter deaths (EWDs) remain a significant public health issue, with over 30,000 EWDs occurring in the UK each year, a majority of which affect older populations. Public Health England has reported a 1.5% increase in EWDs for each degree Celsius drop below 18°C, highlighting the vital need for sufficient home heating.

4. The Right to Warmth: Every pensioner should have the

right to live in a warm and secure home. The decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment risks increasing cold-related illnesses and excess winter deaths among elderly residents who may not qualify for additional support despite being just above the Pension Credit threshold.

This Council Resolves to:

1. Oppose the Removal of Winter Fuel Payments: Strongly oppose the Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to pensioners receiving Pension Credit or certain means-tested benefits, and recognise the disproportionate negative impact this policy will have on some of our most vulnerable elderly residents, particularly in rural areas.

2. Call for the minister responsible for the environment: to support pensioners, by increasing funding for free home insulation schemes in order to make the winter fuel payments go further.

3. Call for a Government Review: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a full review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment. The Council will advocate for ensuring that all pensioners, not receiving Pension Credit but still vulnerable to fuel poverty, continue to receive essential winter fuel support. We need to see a review of all possible ways of organising a better and fairer way of assessing the needs of pensioners for receipt of the Winter Fuel Payments. This would ensure that it is targeted so that all pensioners who need the payment would receive it, not just those on the lowest incomes.

4. Engage Local MPs: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the four Members of Parliament representing East Hertfordshire, urging them to lobby the Government for a reversal of this decision and to ensure protections are in place for vulnerable pensioners who are at risk of fuel poverty. This action is crucial given that 27,486 local pensioners may be affected by this change.

5. Promote Benefit Awareness: Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to seek additional funding for a local outreach and awareness campaign. This campaign will aim to inform pensioners about their eligibility for Pension Credit and other related benefits, particularly targeting those who are eligible but not currently claiming. This effort is intended to ensure that no pensioner misses out on support due to lack of awareness.

In summary, this Council believes the proposed changes to the Winter Fuel Payment system will cause undue hardship to many elderly residents in East Hertfordshire and calls on the Government to reconsider this decision in the interest of public health, financial stability, environmental sustainability and the wellbeing of our pensioners.

185 URGENT ITEM - MEMBER NON-ATTENDANCE WAIVER AND EXTENSION TO SIX-MONTH TIME LIMIT

The Leader of the Council represented the urgent report to Council. He said that if a member of a local authority failed throughout a period of six consecutive months to attend a qualifying meeting, they would cease to be a member unless their failure to attend was approved by the authority before the expiry of that period. He said that this report asked Council to extend the time period for Councillor Woolf due to her ongoing work commitments overseas.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Deering said he was grateful for the Council's supporting and understanding in bringing this report.

The motion to support the recommendations having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - That Councillor Frankie Woolf be granted a waiver of the six-month attendance rule, in accordance with Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, and an extension of the time limit to the meeting of Council scheduled for 26 February 2025.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Chairman
Date