

Date: 09 October 2024

County Council - Thursday 10th October 2024

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the County Council.

I am now able to enclose a copy of the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was circulated.

8. **Questions** (Pages 3 - 14)

Questions to be asked by Members of the County Council of the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member, or a Chairman of a Committee. The question will be answered by the relevant Member and the Member asking the question may then ask a follow up question which will also be answered

John Tradewell
Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services



County Council Meeting – 10 October 2024**Question to Councillor Pert
Cabinet Member for Health and Care****By Cllr Cox**

Question

Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Staffordshire's Pensioners from Fuel Poverty this Winter.

The Labour Government's recently announced their decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit.

Many Charities both locally and nationally have condemned this decision because of the impact that it will have on many vulnerable pensioners, after what has been a difficult few years for many, with an increased 'heating or eating' dilemma this Winter. There are 183,783 pensioners in Staffordshire, not in receipt of pension credits, who now no longer will receive support during some of the coldest months of the year.

Separately 15% of Staffordshire households – or 57,600 households - will struggle to keep a warm, dry home this Winter, particularly in rural areas, due to fuel poverty.

What can the County Council do to help these people and households, some of whom are amongst the most vulnerable in the County?

Reply

While Staffordshire County Council cannot plug the financial gap left by removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance, there are a range of interventions which are available to support older residents. This includes:

- 1. Staffordshire Warmer Homes programme:** Free¹ home adaptations and upgrades to improve energy efficiency, warmth and reduce damp. This can include insulation, solar panels, air-source heat pumps or new boilers.
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¹ Eligibility criteria apply, but can include certain health conditions, including limited mobility, as well as age/condition of property and means test.

2. **'Stay Well This Winter' leaflet:** containing simple advice and information, including how to stay warm in your home and how to save energy. The leaflet will be posted out to older and more vulnerable residents, including those less likely to access digital information.
 3. **Beat the Cold:** a local charity, who work alongside the Council as part of the Warmer Homes Programme, who can provide support and advice to help people stay warm in their homes. This support has no eligibility criteria.
 4. **Benefits [Calculator](#):** a free online calculator that enables people to find out what benefits they may be entitled to. Support to complete the form is available in Staffordshire libraries or via Community Help Points.
 5. **Libraries** as warm spaces and sources of information, advice and help (e.g. with form-filling).
 6. **Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Grants (Public Health):** projects have been funded to provide warm spaces, slow cookers and support to complete applications for eligible benefits. Improving uptake of certain benefits will unlock access to the Winter Fuel allowance.
 7. **Community Help Points-** can signpost and support people to relevant organisations to help with form filling and other sources of help and advice
 8. **Financial assessments.** For those people eligible for Council funded adult social care, the financial assessment to determine their contribution to the cost of care includes an assessment of benefit income with advice and signposting to application for additional benefits, where appropriate.
 9. **Household Support Fund Professionals Referral Scheme.** Approved referrers and Financial Wellbeing Family Hub Coaches can apply for utility support through the Professionals Referral Scheme. Each household can receive a one-off payment of £300.00 paid direct to their energy supplier.
 10. **Household Support Fund Financial Wellbeing Family Hub Coaches.** Our eight Financial Wellbeing Family Hub Coaches will provide direct support to households around their financial wellbeing. This can be provided 1:1, in a group, out in the community and in the household if required. Supporting households to build a sustainable and realistic household budget, explore areas to review and decrease their spending and improve their overall financial wellbeing.
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