

## **Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**24 October 2024**

### **Member's Item: Winter Fuel Payment**

Report from: Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer  
Author: Gemma Gilley, Head of Benefits and Financial Welfare

#### **Summary**

This report sets out a response to a Member's item raised by Councillor Anang, in relation to national changes to the Winter Fuel Payment.

#### **1. Recommendation**

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the comments from the Chief Operating Officer in response to the Member's item.

#### **2. Budget and policy framework**

- 2.1. Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.2) Councillor Anang has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **3. The Issue**

- 3.1. Councillor Anang has requested that an item be placed on the agenda and the reasons are set out below:

With the possibility of the energy price cap rising by 10% next month. How will the council support our pensioners, especially those just over the threshold of receiving pension credit, in view of the "cruel" pensioners winter fuel payment cuts. Because this will have an impact on their health and social wellbeing.

- 3.2. The Committee can use any of its powers in dealing with this Member's item, including making recommendations to officers or the Cabinet.

#### **4. Chief Operating Officer Response**

- 4.1 The council has already commenced activity to support pensioners this winter with a range of activities scheduled as follows:

## 4.2 Pension Credit Take Up Campaign

Members will be aware that within the Cost-of-Living Crisis Response plan, one of the measures was to purchase the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) product from Policy in Practice. This tool has been used to identify those in receipt of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction who may also be entitled to claim Pension Credit. We have identified 440 cases and have written to each resident. The letter explains how to claim Pension Credit, and the support that can be given from the Financial Welfare Team. The letter also invites each recipient to an event at the Pentagon Centre on 21 October 2024.

## 4.3 Pensioner Event – 21 October 2024

We have organised an event in the former Wilko's store in the Pentagon for Pensioners to attend highlight the support available to pensioners this winter. Whilst the primary focus is ensuring Pension Credit take up is maximised, we have used this opportunity to invite other council services and partners to show the wide variety of support available to Pensioners. Confirmed attendees to date are the DWP, MVA, Age UK, Carers First, Imago, alongside our Benefits and Financial Welfare Teams, Housing Services, Public Health, Medway Integrated Community Equipment Services and Medway Adult Education. Officers will be able to provide an update after the event.

## 4.4 Pension Credit Awareness

The DWP organised a Pension Credit awareness week starting from 2 September and provided digital assets to enable promotion. Since that time, we have been advertising Pension Credit, not just to Pensioners but to friends, family and organisations who support pensioners. The council's website has been updated with the latest information and officers within the Financial Welfare Team are ready to support residents.

The DWP have started preparatory work to drive up Pension Credit Take Up through data sharing and customer contact. While we have already identified 440 customers who could benefit from Pension Credit, there are many more who we simply will not know about. The DWP is looking into sharing data regarding this cohort however, as you can appreciate, this is a complex matter.

## 4.5 Household Support Fund

We will be continuing to operate the Household Support Fund throughout the winter with over £1million allocated to support all residents, this includes support with energy. Delegations granted by Cabinet allow officers to respond to need as it is identified over the duration of the fund.

# 5 Risk Management

## 5.1 There are no significant risks to the Council arising from this report.

## 6 Legal and Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications for the Council arising from this report. Any financial implications will be met from existing revenue budgets or grant funding.

### Lead officer contact

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### Appendices

None

### Background papers

None