

Charity calls for government action for pensioners affected by changes to winter fuel allowance

Charity Age Scotland has written to both governments urging them to outline plans to tackle the crisis facing the lowest income pensioners who are affected by the loss of the Winter Fuel Payment. But as they make this call, Edinburgh East MP, Chris Murray defends his position in supporting the cut.

The government has changed the eligibility for Winter Fuel Payment so that, from winter 2024/2025, households will no longer be entitled to it unless they receive Pension Credit or certain other means-tested benefits.

In a letter to Scottish Secretary of State, The Rt Hon Ian Murray, the charity highlighted recent figures identifying 200,000 pensioners living in poverty or just above the poverty line. These people will no longer receive their Winter Fuel Payment, previously worth up to £300 to help with energy costs.



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The letter to The Scottish Government welcomed the recent vote at Holyrood condemning the UK government's decision. But the charity has called on ministers to be clear about how they intend to deliver the devolved Pension Age Winter Heating Payment when they assume responsibility for the benefit next year.

The letter also calls on The Scottish Government to do all it can to support a campaign to increase the uptake of Pension

Credit. This they say would help to identify more of the 65,000 pensioners in Scotland who are eligible but do not claim the important benefit.

In the letter to Ian Murray, Katherine Crawford, chief executive of Age Scotland, wrote: "I am grateful for the frank discussion we had about the challenges older people will face and for your interest in our analysis of the scale and impact this policy decision will have.

"In the time since we met, OFGEM announced a substantial increase to the energy price cap this winter and huge numbers of older people have been in touch about how they will really struggle to manage their energy bills, and stay warm, with less financial means. Our petition with Age UK has also gathered 560,000 signatures in opposition to this cut.

"With the UK Government's Budget imminent, I am writing to ask that you draw the Prime Minister and Chancellor's attention to new analysis from our partners at Age UK which shows that 85% of pensioners in Scotland who live in poverty or are just above the poverty line will lose their Winter Fuel Payment."

In the letter to the First Minister, John Swinney, Katherine Crawford wrote: "The overwhelming support of parliament for the motion was significant. With it, the Scottish Government has clearly accepted how important it is that the decision is reversed and that action is urgent.

"As you shape the Scottish Budget for 2024/25, we ask that you give the most serious consideration to how the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment can be better resourced next year so that those pensioners who are in desperate need are supported.

"It seems clear that the Scottish Government need to identify a plan and associated funding for this to happen before the end of this year whilst you work budget proposals. Leaving any policy proposals or consultation later will inevitably mean that there is no money available to support older people with

this vital issue.”

Edinburgh East MP defends the decision

Chris Murray, MP for Edinburgh East, explained in an interview with The Edinburgh Reporter this week why he had supported the move to end the universal payment for all pensioners. He said: “We did not want to do it, but pensioners’ winter fuel allowance was allocated based on age.



Chris Murray MP

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“That’s not the case any more, and fuel poverty is not linked particularly to your age. But for people who do receive the winter fuel there’s also the state pension. The state pension is protected by the triple lock, which means it goes up in line with earnings, inflation or 2.5% whichever is the highest. What that meant is the state pension had gone up £900 this year and will go up £500 next year.

“So the state pension is increasing quite a clip – the winter fuel allowance is £300. Every pensioner will be getting more money next year than they would have had this year – by more in the state pension.

“So no one’s worse off. The decision then was can we means test the state pension? So you would make sure that the

poorest pensioners on pension credit get the winter fuel allowance to pay their bills.

“Everyone else will have the state pension increasing above the triple lock. The decision to do that was made because we have a massive gap in public finances that we absolutely have to fill. But it was a difficult decision.”