

Notice of Motion – Rule 12

Motion 1

Councillor Flood will move that:

Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty

Test Valley Borough Council notes:

- The Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role the Winter Fuel Payment plays in helping older residents of Test Valley afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

Test Valley Borough Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- That while some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, there are many across Test Valley that sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit who will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures for the most vulnerable, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and older residents unable to afford the basics of food and warmth.
- That the government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

Test Valley Borough Council further notes:

- That towards the end of 2022, the Council, in partnership with Unity and Citizens Advice Test Valley, launched a Winter Fuel Payment scheme whereby anyone who received a Winter Fuel Payment, but didn't need it, was able to donate it to help other pensioners in the area struggling with the rising cost of living. The Council match funded donations from members of the public and as a result, was able to support vulnerable pensioners in Test valley with the cost of their bills.

- Over the past two years, in an environment where all pensioners have received a winter fuel payment, the scheme has raised around £9,000 and made in excess of £3,000 worth of payments to nearly 40 households. This winter, with so many households losing their winter payments, we expect many more to need help.

Test Valley Borough Council recommends:

1. That the Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who are just above the threshold for Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
2. That on behalf of Test Valley Brough Council, the Leader signs the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and that all borough councillors sign the petition themselves.
3. That a Council-led local communications campaign be developed to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Test Valley are alerted to, and supported in, claiming their entitlement to Pension Credit and to the Winter Fuel Payment.
4. That building on the success of the previous scheme administered by Unity and Citizen's Advice, that the Council provides further funding of £20,000 to enable the continuation of the Test Valley Winter Fuel Payment Scheme for those of pensionable age in the Borough who need assistance with paying their bills. Helping over 200 of the most vulnerable pensioner households in Test Valley.
5. That the Head of Finance and Revenues in consultation with the Leader, the Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder and the Leader of the Opposition be authorised to make available an additional £20,000 to top up the scheme if required.

Councillor Gwynne will second the motion

Motion 2

Councillor M Cooper will move that:

1. The Council believes strongly in a plan led system to provide housing, employment land and appropriate infrastructure and is concerned by the implications contained within the revised NPPF, in particular the inadequate transitional arrangements, and which will lead instead to a speculative development system.
2. The Council thus strongly supports the letter written by the Council Leader and Planning Portfolio holder to the Deputy Prime Minister to express Test Valley Borough Council's concern about the implications of having to halt our draft Borough Local Plan at the Regulation 18 stage 2 as a consequence of being required to move from providing 524 dwellings per year in the next plan period to 921 dwellings per year. This would mean that our housing land supply would fall from over six years to less than three years resulting in developers making speculative planning applications on the land they either own or on which they have options. The location of those applications will thus be decided by the developers and not the local planning authority leading to piecemeal and ad hoc developments.
3. This Council believes that once developers get their planning permissions because of our lack of HLS, they may then land bank their permissions in order to constrict housing supply and thus maintain high prices and their profit margins.
4. Council thus supports:-
 - a) That the housing provision stays at 524 p.a. until such time as Test Valley Borough Council has had time to progress a revised BLP to an advanced stage which allocates sites for the required 921 p.a. thus allowing the Council to retain a plan led system.
 - b) That once a permission is issued there should be a set timeline to bring the houses to market and further that if an agreed timeline is not adhered to, then the land be subject to financial penalties (which may include an annual Site Value Tax) as a disincentive for land-banking and in order for the Council to continue to meet its five year housing land supply.
 - c) Notes that the creation of a financial disincentive for land-banking will require legislation at a national level and requests that the Council writes to the appropriate Ministers urging that Parliamentary time be given to facilitate housing delivery.

Councillor Parker will second the motion