



Winter fuel payment replaced by some London councils Free 281224

Description



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An east London council is rolling out its replacement winter fuel payment after the government changed the criteria, meaning millions of pensioners no longer qualify.

Tower Hamlets Council is offering a £175 cash payment to pensioners it has assessed as in need to help with winter pressures.

The government said it was “committed to supporting pensioners” and the £200-£300 winter fuel payment would be targeted to those most in need who are on pension credit.

According to the Department for Work and Pension (DWP), Tower Hamlets has the largest proportion of pensioners receiving pension credit of any local authority in England at 44% – meaning they remain eligible for the winter fuel allowance.

In July, the government said the change to means-test the payment was necessary to help address a £22bn “black hole” in public finances. This figure has been contested.

The changes mean that more than 10 million pensioners across the UK will not receive a government payment designed to help with energy bills.

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Some other councils in London are running their own schemes to help replace the winter fuel payment, including Wandsworth Council which is offering £300 for eligible pensioners aged 80 or over, and £200 for those under 80.

A Tower Hamlets Council spokesperson said it was funding its £1m initiative by two thirds from council own funds, with the remaining money coming from the DWP’s household support fund (HSF).

Local authorities in the capital have been allocated £135.7m from the national fund for 2024-25, according to London Councils, a representative group for the capital’s local authorities.

Tower Hamlets mayor Lutfur Rahman said: “I’ve spoken with many elderly residents who are afraid of being forced to endure life-threateningly low temperatures this winter, or having to make the impossible choice between heating and eating because their access to the winter fuel allowance has been withdrawn.”

He added that the council had “stepped in to fill the void left by these cuts”.

Eligible residents in the borough are being sent letters with details on how to claim the money from local Post Office branches.

Carol, from Tower Hamlets, said the money would make a great difference.

“For the last few years we’ve been getting the £300, and this year we’re getting nothing,” she said.

Maggie, who chairs a residents’ association on the Isle of Dogs, said: “If the council can recognise it,

why is our government not recognising it?

A government spokesperson said: “We are committed to supporting pensioners – with millions set to see their state pension rise by up to £1,900 this parliament through our commitment to the triple lock.

“Over a million pensioners will still receive the winter fuel payment, and our drive to boost pension credit take-up has already seen a 152% increase in claims.

“Many others will also benefit from the £150 warm home discount to help with energy bills over winter, while our extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) will help with the cost of food, heating and bills.”

‘Really worried’

Phil Mawhinney, from Age UK, said it was “very welcome” that some local authorities were developing their own winter support schemes as the loss of the government’s winter fuel payment was a “real, real concern”.

He said losing the winter fuel payment most adversely affected those in poor health who need to run medical equipment.

“Even though we’ve seen a lot more applications to pension credit in recent months, which is very welcome, a very high proportion of those are from people who aren’t even eligible,” Mr Mawhinney told BBC London.

“You’ve got people just above the pension credit line who are really worried,” he added.

The winter fuel payment is worth £200 for those on certain benefits and born between 23 September 1944 and 22 September 1958.

For those born before 23 September 1944, and on certain benefits, it is worth £300.

If you live with someone, and jointly claim benefits, only one of the couple receives the payment.

It is usually paid automatically in November or December. Those eligible will receive a letter confirming their entitlement.

Those who are not currently on pension credit but may be entitled to it have until 21 December to apply in order to get the payment this year.

You can check your eligibility for pension credit via the government’s online calculator, [external](#).

What support is available in your area?

The London Councils spokesperson said: “Councils receive funding from the government and then decide how best to deliver support for their residents based on local needs and priorities.”

The spokesperson said local authorities had used the HSF to provide support to 218,000 families, and

made numerous one-off payments to those in need, in the year up to January 2024.

All 32 of London's borough councils were asked for their response to changes in the winter fuel payment scheme.

The following told BBC London:

- **Barking & Dagenham Council** is sending out letters to pensioner households eligible for a £300 support payment for those who no longer qualify for the winter fuel payment
- **Bexley Council** is using money from the HSF to focus on older residents, including encouraging the take-up of pension credit and providing support through local organisations such as food banks
- **Ealing Council** says that while it isn't directly replacing the winter fuel payment, it is providing local welfare assistance to residents in crisis
- **Haringey Council** is offering a £200 cash payment to pensioners who do not qualify for pension credit but are in receipt of council tax support or housing benefit
- **Harrow Council** says it is using the HSF to pay the equivalent of the winter fuel payment to pensioners who no longer qualify, identified through council tax support records
- **Kensington and Chelsea Council** did not provide details but says it is "looking at all options" to help support its most vulnerable residents
- **Kingston Council** is offering a one-off payment to pensioners who are less than £1,000 over the pension credit threshold, and is actively encouraging people to check if they're eligible for the payment
- **Newham Council** runs a hardship support fund which any resident in the borough can apply for to access a range of services needed to support vulnerable residents
- **Redbridge Council** says its "primary goal" is getting as many eligible people signed up for pension credit while working to identify and provide help to low-income pensioners in need
- **Richmond Council** is introducing a £100 payment for low-income pensioners who are not eligible for the government's winter fuel payment via pension credit
- **Southwark Council** says it is not directly replacing the winter fuel payment but is supporting residents struggling with the cost of living, including an energy savers scheme for those who need help with bills
- **Sutton Council** says it isn't replacing the winter fuel payment directly but is assisting eligible residents to apply for pension credit and offering a £300 payment through a hardship fund
- **Wandsworth Council** is offering £300 for those aged 80 or over, and £200 for those under 80, targeted at pensioners on Council Tax Reduction and not receiving pension credit. They are being written to directly.

For full details on what support is available in your area, visit your local council's website.

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