



NORTH TYNESIDE  
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To:

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**Chronicle Live**

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## Winter fuel allowance

Gordon Brown, when Chancellor, introduced the Universal Winter Fuel payment for pensioners in 1997. It was £20 then, or £40 in today's money and paid to everyone over 60 years. Since then, it has risen, along with fuel prices and the retirement age. That is until the legislation was passed on 10th September 2024 in the Commons. Previously, the tax-free sum of between £100 and £300 was paid to all UK citizens over 66 living in the country. It cost nearly £2 billion per year and was paid to just over 12 million people. Now it is proposed that only pensioners receiving pension credit will receive this benefit.

It is estimated that almost 30% of pensioners that should qualify for pension credits don't receive it. In money this adds up to almost £21 billion in unclaimed benefits. Basically, if all the people who are entitled to pension credits claimed it and received the winter fuel allowance that would wipe out the savings made by this measure. Over a million pensioners are just over the threshold for pension credit by just a couple of pounds. When the Winter Fuel Allowance is taken from them, they will have less than those on pension credit.

Last year it was estimated, by the House of Commons, that an excess of 5000 deaths was caused by cold homes. In 2017 research by the Labour Party, when Keir Starmer was a Shadow member of the Cabinet, showed that over 4000 deaths would be caused if the Tory government cut the Winter Fuel Allowance.



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Some people argue that lots of pensioners are wealthy and don't need this. But surely a much fairer solution would be to tax the rich and still ensure that everyone receives this allowance. Labour did not have this measure in their Manifesto as it knew it would be toxic. Both Rachel Reeves and Angela Rayner denounced the Tories when they were going to cut the allowance and said they would defend the triple lock as well as the Winter Fuel payments.

Now elected, they are making 'difficult decisions' while some, like Rachel Reeves, claim £3000 in fuel allowances for themselves in her expenses. The truth is the "difficult decisions" are taxing the rich and wealthy corporations, many who have backed labour these days. The easy targets are the poor, the elderly and the disabled. I think Labour may have met their match with pensioners and that the £1.5 billion saving may cost them millions of votes.

**Sincerely,**

**Cathy Davis**

North Tyneside Community Independent



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