

In the summer of 2010, the NPC met the Pensions Minister Steve Webb and he confirmed that the coalition government would be reducing the winter fuel allowance in 2011 by £50 for the under 80s and by £100 for the over 80s. Since then the DWP has stated that they have yet to decide the level of the allowance in 2011.

However, we have written evidence from a Conservative MP confirming Mr Webb's statement and the Chancellor announced in the Spending Review that: "Winter Fuel Payments will remain exactly as budgeted for by the previous Government". This means that the levels will be reduced because that is what the previous government had decided.

Just before Christmas, the Business Secretary Vince Cable also suggested that the allowance was under threat.

Already over 70 MPs have signed an NPC sponsored Early Day Motion 481 criticising the move.

In various public statements on the issue the NPC has pointed out that the winter death rate amongst older people is a national scandal. Last winter over 25,000 pensioners died of cold related illnesses – a staggering 9 pensioners every hour. Cutting the winter fuel allowance which will only make matters worse.

Up to 3.5m pensioner households are already spending more than 10% of their income on fuel bills, and are living in fuel poverty. What older people need now is more money – not less. They need to be reassured that they will not be financially punished for keeping warm in winter. The government must give them confidence that they will be able to pay their bills by immediately ruling out any changes to the winter fuel allowance.

FUEL POVERTY FACTS

- Nearly 90 per cent of all excess winter deaths are of people over the age of 65.
- Almost one in three older people live in homes with inadequate heating or insulation making their homes more difficult to heat and/or keep warm.
- More than 1 in 4 people living in fuel poverty are over 70 years old
- Average annual energy bills now exceed £1,000. This will absorb 16 per cent of the income of a single pensioner dependent on the pension credit minimum guarantee and the current £250 Winter Fuel Payment.
- When the Winter Fuel Payment was originally introduced it covered around one third of the average fuel bill. Today, it only covers around a fifth.

From: End Fuel Poverty Coalition [<mailto:info@endfuelpoverty.org.uk>]

Sent: 25 January 2011 18:51