

COUNCIL FORUM

THURSDAY 3rd OCTOBER 2024

PRESENT – The Mayor Councillor Taylor (Chair) and Councillors Ali, Brookfield, Casey, Connor, Desai, Fazal, Fielding, Floyd, Gibson, Gunn, Hardman, Humphrys, Hussain M, Hussain S, Hussain W, Imtiaz, Jackson, Johnson, Kapadia, Khan Z, Khan R, Khonat, Mahmud Q, Mahmood T, Marrow, McCaughran, McGurk, Masters, Patel A, Patel M, Patel S, Raja, Rigby, Riley, Russell, Shaw, Shorrocks, Slater Jacq, Slater Jo, Slater Ju, Slater N, Smith D and Whittingham.

RESOLUTIONS

34. Prayers by Mayor's chaplain followed by Welcome and Apologies

Following the reading of the Notice convening the meeting by the Chief Executive, there then followed prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain. Apologies were received from Councillors Akhtar, Ahmed, Khan S, Sidat, Smith J and Whalley.

At this point of the meeting a Minute's Silence was observed in memory of former Councillor Eileen Entwistle, who sadly recently passed away.

35. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – The Minutes of the meeting held on 25th July 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

36. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were submitted.

37. Presentation of Civic Service Awards

The Mayor presented Civic Service Awards to former Councillors Dave Harling and Abdul Patel in recognition of their outstanding service over many years serving the Council.

38. Mayoral Communications

The Mayor read out a letter from the Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner who had passed on her condolences on the recent passing of former Councillor Eileen Entwistle.

The Mayor also updated Council Forum on recent events and activities he had attended including the Blackburn Royal British Legion Veteran's Breakfast Club, Darwen Festival of Fun and Artisan Market, National Youth Brass Concert at Blackburn Cathedral, the 60th Anniversary of Beauman Court, the IMO Picnic in the Park at Queen's Park Hall, World Suicide Prevent Day, the Re-dedication of the Accrington Pals Memorial Garden, the Annual Judge Service at Preston, a question and answer session with year 5 pupils at Lower Darwen Primary School, welcomed the Acorn Recovery Programme a Drug and Alcohol Treatment along with a number of events across the Borough connected with the Heritage Open Day.

The Mayor advised that tickets were still available for the Ladies Fashion Show on 17th October and that his Ball would be on Friday 4th April 2025. The Remembrance Concert was scheduled for 4th November 2024, 6.30 p.m. at King George's Hall.

39. Council Forum

The Chief Executive announced that no questions had been submitted by members of the public under Procedure Rule 10.

40. Motions

The Chief Executive announced that one Motion had been submitted under Procedure Rule 12:

Winter Heating Payment

This Council considers that the Chancellor's recent decision to end the Winter Fuel payment with no compensatory measures to protect needy pensioners; to restrict it to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits to be ill conceived and contrary to the universality of the payment as introduced by Gordon Brown in 1997.

It is widely believed by organisations such as Age Concern, Trade Unions and Councils that as many as 1.6 million pensioners could be adversely affected by this decision.

Particularly at risk will be those:

- *With high energy needs because of disability or illness and, or live in energy inefficient homes, which are expensive to heat (around 200,000 in this instance).*

- *Who just miss out on Pension Credit because their very modest incomes are slightly too high for them to be eligible, usually because they have a tiny occupational pension. Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week or £332.95 per week for a couple will be eligible for Pension Credit this is significantly lower than the Living Wage Rate of £11.44.*
- *Who currently do not claim Pension Credit but are eligible, around 1 million. The government's approach fails to consider that this is an entrenched aversion and that administrative barriers are also a factor for non-claiming.*

The timing of this cut is appalling; announced shortly before the winter months and after Ofgem raised the Energy Price Cap by 10% meaning a typical household bill will rise, from 1st October, by £149 per annum. It is expected that the number of people eligible for the Winter Payment will fall by 10 million (from 11.1 million to only 1.2 million); it also means that if pensioners choose to eat rather than heat, they will not avoid receiving a bill for the iniquitous standing charge.

Government is about choice – this choice is without merit and makes no political or financial sense.

This Council resolves to:

Request the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on behalf of the 21,000 pensioners who reside in Blackburn with Darwen, calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately reversed and seek alternative options, where economies can be made without incurring unnecessary financial hardship on those least able to afford them.

***Moved by Councillor Kevin Conor
Seconded by Councillor John Slater***

Following debate, an Amended Motion was circulated to Members as follows (amendments in italics and bold):

Amendment to the Motion on Winter Heating Payment

The Council consider that the Chancellor's recent decision ***restrict*** the Winter Fuel payment to only those in receipt of Pension Credits ***may be seen as*** contrary to the universality of the payment as introduced by Gordon Brown in 1997, ***but we believe that there is no longer any justification for this benefit to be paid to all pensioners, including the 25% of pensioners with assets of £1m or more.***

Whilst acknowledging the need to redress the £22bn budget deficit, the decision to introduce measures that will ensure that those in need of financial support for fuel costs will continue to receive it, is welcomed. However, it is believed by organisations such as Age Concern, Trade Unions and Councils that as many as **1.5 million** pensioners could be adversely affected by this decision.

Particularly at risk will be those:

- With high energy needs because of disability or illness and, or live in energy inefficient homes, which are expensive to heat (around 200,000 in this instance). **The Council supports the Government's ongoing work to prevent energy companies from charging extortionate rates to vulnerable residents.**
- Who just miss out on Pension Credit because their incomes are slightly too high for them to be eligible. **We ask the Chancellor to review the eligibility threshold and consider a sliding scale of support.**
- Who currently do not claim Pension Credit but are eligible. Around **900,000 people fall into this category nationally and we support the steps being taken by the Government and by Councils, including BwD to overcome the administrative barriers that** are also a factor for non-claiming.

It is expected that the number of people eligible for the Winter Payment will fall by 10 million (from 11.1 million to only 1.2 million).

Government is about choice. **The Government in choosing a path of fiscal responsibility will continue to need to make difficult decisions but it is incumbent on this Council to ensure that residents in BwD are supported and considered throughout the process.**

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

Request the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on behalf of the 21,000 pensioners who reside in Blackburn with Darwen, calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be **reconsidered in line with the above recommendations.**

**Moved by Councillor Phil Riley
Seconded by Councillor Julie Gunn**

This amendment was put to the vote and CARRIED, the amended Motion, now being the Substantive Motion, was put to the vote:

RESOLVED – That the Motion be CARRIED.

41. Updates from other Committees

Council Forum received the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2023/24 along with an update on progress of the Policy and Corporate Resources, Health and Social Care, Children and Young People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the current Municipal Year.

42. Reports of the Executive Members with Portfolios

43. Leader

Councillor Riley presented his report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

44. Growth and Development

Councillor Q. Mahmood presented his report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

45. Housing and Public Health

Councillor D. Talbot presented his report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

46. Finance and Governance

Councillor V. McGurk presented her report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

47. Environment and Communities

Councillor J. Casey presented the report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

48. Adult Social Care and Health

Councillor J. Floyd presented her report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

49. Children, Young People and Education

Councillor J. Gunn presented her report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

50. Digital and Customer Services

Councillor M. Hussain presented his report and responded to questions from Members.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

51. Questions from Members

No questions from Members had been received under Procedure Rule 11.

Signed at a meeting of the Policy Council
on Thursday 5th December 2024
(being the ensuing meeting of the Council Forum) by

MAYOR