



Southend Labour office
268 Sutton Road,
Southend-on-Sea,
SS2 5ET
30th September 2024

Dear Mr James Newport

Many thanks for getting in contact with me about this, and for registering your concerns around changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance (WFA). Thank you in particular for the opportunity to sign your open letter. Whilst I will not be adding my name, I welcome the chance to hear about some of the key concerns around the WFA in Rochford.

The WFA was a policy first introduced by the incoming Labour government in 1997. So the decision to remove the universal element was not one which I or any of my Labour colleagues took lightly. However, the £22bn black hole identified by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, along with the crisis inherited in public services, creates a very difficult situation. My hope is that by acting now the government can stabilise the economy and start to turn around the tanker.

The Chancellor has been clear that this does not mean a return to austerity. And my own priority has been to ensure that the policies used to tackle the shortfall are fair. I set out my thinking here in a public statement at the time of the vote (see enclosed).

To this end, one of the things I have been most pleased by since the vote has been the growth in uptake of the pension credit. Projections suggest a big increase, among those who were entitled but who were not previously claiming it. These will include some of society's most vulnerable older people, who will now be getting not just the WFA itself but the other financial support they need.

The WFA changes passed through the House of Commons at the start of this month. I will continue to monitor its impact. But my focus now is on helping as many as possible of my eligible constituents to access pension credits and other financial support this winter. My hope is that other agencies and organisations will prioritise this in the same way.

Thank you again for contacting me about this.

Kind regards

Bayo Alaba

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