

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Sent by email

18 September 2024

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter of 15 August. I am also looking forward to working with you and ministerial colleagues in the Welsh Government to deliver on our missions and shared priorities, including driving down poverty, driving up opportunity and employment, and increasing economic growth in Wales, and every part of the country.

As the first step to rebuilding Britain, we must fix the foundations of our economy to make the changes our country desperately needs. Given our dire inheritance, including the £22 billion black hole in the public finances this year, we have had to make hard choices, including the difficult decision to focus winter fuel payments on those in the greatest need.

It is right that when money is tight, our priority must be to focus resources on those in greatest need. As you highlight, that means tackling the national scandal that up to 880,000 of the very poorest pensioners are not claiming the Pension Credit they are entitled to, and therefore are missing out on benefits like the winter fuel payment.

I am pleased to hear about the success of the Welsh Government's 'Claim What's Yours' initiative and the positive outcomes it has achieved. Over several weeks we have seen claims for Pension Credit more than double. To further increase uptake, we have:

- Launched a major awareness campaign, continuing right up until the deadline for applying on December 21st, including encouraging people to ask their retired family, friends and neighbours to claim. This is backed by 450 extra staff to ensure claims are processed as quickly as possible.
- Joined forces with external partners to get pensioners to check their eligibility and apply for Pension Credit.
- The Deputy Prime Minister and I wrote to all local authorities asking them to support our national Pension Credit campaign and help us reach those eligible pensioners who have not claimed Pension Credit, so they continue to receive a Winter Fuel Payment.
- We will be directly contacting approximately 120,000 pensioner households, including in Wales, who are in receipt of Housing Benefit and who we have identified as eligible for, but not currently claiming, Pension Credit.

- And in the longer term - because the only way to guarantee greater uptake is to make the whole process more automatic - we will bring forward the administration of Housing Benefit and Pension Credit.

The warm homes discount of £150 is also available, not just to those on Pension Credit, but those on Housing Benefit with high energy costs too.

This extra help is built on the bedrock of support for all pensioners through our commitment to the pension triple lock throughout this entire Parliament. As a result, the full New State Pension is forecast to increase by a further £1,700 over the course of this Parliament, on top of this year's rise of £900, and last year's £970 increase.

I know that DWP officials engage effectively with Welsh Government officials. I am keen that we continue to work together to ensure that pensioners across Britain get all the benefits to which they are entitled. My officials will continue to engage with yours as our communications plans are finalised.

I look forward to discussing a range of issues with you in the coming months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Liz Kendall'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Liz' and the last name 'Kendall' clearly distinguishable.

THE RT HON LIZ KENDALL MP