



Winter Newsletter 2008/9

From Yvette Cooper MP

Working for older people in Castleford, Pontefract and Knottingley

Dear Friend



Welcome to my latest newsletter for older people in Pontefract, Castleford, Knottingley and Normanton Common.

I know pensioners round here are concerned about increases in their energy and food bills due to the big increases in world oil and food prices. The price of oil is starting to come down and I'm calling on energy companies to pass on the cuts to customers.

But I wanted to make sure you were aware of the help and support that is available to you this winter.

The Chancellor recently announced a £60 bonus for all pensioners which you will get in your state pension this January to help towards bills, as well as increasing Pension Credit and the State Pension from April.

I have also included details of how you can get free insulation or central heating improvements to help keep your home warm.

If you have any questions or think I may be able to help you in any way, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me at my office. Finally, I hope you have a great Christmas, and wish you all the best for 2009.

Best wishes,

Yvette Cooper



CALLING ALL VETERANS AND LAND GIRLS!!!



I have been really pleased over the past few years to have presented Veterans Badges to 211 former servicemen from our area at special presentation ceremonies.

It was also wonderful to be able to hold a tea dance for this year's Veterans Day to celebrate former service men and women from our area. More recently I also held another tea dance to formally present 16 of our local Land Girls with the new Women's Land Army Badges. These have been great afternoons for me and everyone who attended, and I plan to hold more over the coming year.

I am keen to make sure that all former Land Girls and Veterans in our area receive their badges and come along to our next get-together!

If you, or someone you know, are eligible for a Veterans or Women's Land Army badge, please get in touch with my office on **01977 553388** or write to me at the following address:

Yvette Cooper MP, 1 York Street, Castleford, WF10 1JS



LATEST NEWS!!!

Free Travel

Pensioners can now travel anywhere in England by local buses for free! If you haven't got your National Bus Pass yet, you can apply via Wakefield Council, or contact my office to request an application form.

Free Swimming

The Government recently announced funding for local authorities to offer free swimming for the over-60s, and I am delighted that Wakefield MDC has taken up this offer and will be offering free swimming.



What help is available?



HOW TO CLAIM

It's now easier to claim Housing and Council Tax Benefit along with Pension Credit. You can now claim all three benefits with just one **free** phone call to:

0800 99 1234

When you call to make your claim, you should have the following information handy:

- Your **National Insurance** number.
- Information about any **money you have coming in**, e.g. occupational pensions.
- Information about any **savings or investments** you may have.
- Details of **bank account** you would like your benefits to be paid into.

If you are hard of hearing or have speech difficulties, the textphone number is:

0800 169 0133

WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS

This autumn all pensioners will receive an additional one-off Winter Fuel payment.

- If you're over 60 you'll get an extra £50 on top of your usual £200 Winter Fuel payment.
- Over 80's will get an extra £100.

If you think you qualify for the Winter Fuel Payment and have not received it by the middle of December, you may wish to contact the dedicated helpline on **08459 15 15 15**.

If you get Winter Fuel Allowance you will also automatically receive Cold Weather Payments, which have recently been increased to **£25** per week. This payment is made when the day time temperature in your area is 0°C for seven days running.

PENSION CREDIT

To make sure that all over-60s receive a decent minimum income, Pension Credit can top up your income to **£124.05** a week for a single person or **£189.35** for a couple, rising to **£130** and **£198** respectively in April.

If you or your partner are over 65 and have saved for your retirement, you may also be eligible for extra help - up to **£26.13** a week for couples or **£19.71** for singles.

HOUSING BENEFIT

- Depending on your income, you could be eligible for some or all of your rent paid, even if your weekly income is up to £330 a week for couples over 65.
- Different levels apply depending on your circumstances.

COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

More people than ever can claim help towards their Council Tax because of recent changes to the system. So even if you didn't qualify before, it is worth applying now.

- Pensioners who receive the income guarantee element of Pension Credit **automatically qualify** for their Council Tax to be paid, but have to apply for it.
- If you don't receive Pension Credit, you may still be able to claim some help if your income is less than £349 a week for couples over 65.

Help with your Household Bills



WHAT SUPPORT CAN I GET?

The Government has recently announced a new £1 billion package of measures to help people on low and fixed incomes to permanently cut their energy bills.

From this autumn:

- Pensioners over 70 who are home-owners are eligible for **free** loft and cavity wall insulation which could save you up to £300 a year on your bills.
- Cold weather payments for the most vulnerable will be **increased** from £8.50 to £25 a week.
- Energy companies have said that they will provide more **cut-price** tariffs.

WHERE DO I GO FOR HELP?

There are a number of different sources and types of help available for pensioners. Below are the details of the best points of contact:

1. WARM FRONT - 0800 316 2805

If you own your own home or rent it from a private landlord, you may be eligible for a grant of up to £2,700 (or £4,000 if oil central heating is involved) under the Warm Front Scheme to improve your heating system or insulate your walls or loft. If you or your partner qualify for Pension Credit, Housing or Council Tax Benefit you should contact Warm Front to discuss your claim, and even if you are not in receipt of these benefits, the Warm Front adviser will be able to perform a full benefit assessment for your household.



2. ENERGY SAVING TRUST - 0800 512 012

You can contact the Energy Saving Trust for free, independent and local energy saving advice, including how to access deals on discounted or free insulation schemes which may be operating in the area. The Energy Savings Trust will also give you advice on what you can do to cut your energy usage, such as using draught excluders or radiator thermostats.



3. HOME HEAT HELPLINE - 0800 33 66 99

This helpline can put you in touch with the right people at your energy supplier who can arrange reduced tariffs if you're on a low income, or other services such as free insulation and energy saving measures for your home. If you are already having trouble paying your bills, they can put you in contact with someone at your energy provider who can help you manage your payments better. Home Heat can also check if you may be entitled to other help and refer you to Warm Front if you qualify.

4. CONSUMER DIRECT - 08454 040506

This is a Government funded advice service. They can give you advice on resolving complaints you may have with your energy company, as well as help with debt management. Consumer Direct will also be able to provide you with a factsheet of all the energy suppliers in the area and their tariffs, so you can choose the cheapest option available.

5. WAKEFIELD COUNCIL HOME ENERGY TEAM - 08449 020222

Wakefield Council's Home Energy Team are a one-stop shop for helping you save energy in the home and reduce your fuel bills. The team offers impartial advice, information and assistance on claiming grants and discounts from local schemes for making your home more energy efficient, which will save you money on your bills for years to come.

Useful Numbers

Age Concern:	01977 552114
Airedale Library:	01977 724040
Castleford Library:	01977 722085
Castleford Bowling Club:	01977 553578
Castleford and Airedale Neighbourhood Policing Teams:	01924 206210
Castleford Swimming Pool:	01977 722055
CISWO/Thornycroft Resource Centre (Pontefract):	01977 703384
Councillors:	01924 305115
Elder Abuse Response:	0808 8088141
Ferrybridge Bowling Club:	01977 673269
Ferrybridge Community Centre:	01977 676056
Glasshoughton Healthy Living Centre:	01977 511234
Help the Aged Senior Line:	0808 8006565
Knottingley Library:	01977 722450
Knottingley Sports Centre:	01977 722505
Metroline Information:	0113 2457676
National Rail Enquiries:	08457 484950
National Express:	08705 808080
Neighbourhood Action Line:	08458 506506
NHS Direct Medical Advice Line:	0845 4647
Normanton Jubilee Swimming Pool:	01924 302475
The Pensions Advisory Service:	0845 6012923
Pontefract & Castleford Express Talking Newspaper:	01977 722755
Pontefract Library:	01977 727692
Pontefract and Knottingley Neighbourhood Policing Teams:	01924 206228
Pontefract Swimming Pool:	01977 722755
Service Personnel and Veterans Agency Helpline:	0800 1692277
St. Mary's Community Centre:	01977 705341
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council:	01924 306090



WESTMINSTER TOURS AND DEBATES

If you are planning a visit to London on a week day, why not have a look around Parliament or watch a debate from the Strangers Gallery? My office will be happy to arrange a guided tour of the Palace of Westminster, tickets for a debate or, if you're feeling fit, a trip up the Big Ben Clock Tower!

Please note that tours and tickets are subject to availability, so please try to give as much notice as possible to avoid disappointment.

Yvette Cooper MP

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