



Friday, 13 September 2024

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you on behalf of all GMB London Branches, as each has been contacted by a growing number of our retired members who are deeply concerned about recent Government decisions, particularly the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance from all but the poorest pensioners. These cuts, combined with rising costs of living, will have a devastating impact on the most vulnerable in our society.

GMB represents not only workers but also a large base of retired members, who have contributed to our economy for decades. Their voices deserve to be heard, and their dignity must be preserved. Many of them are fearful for the winter ahead, facing the harsh reality that they may not be able to afford to heat their homes. These members made tough budgetary choices during their working lives, particularly council, NHS and low paid workers who have faced the brunt of austerity under 14 years of Conservative Governance. Now, in retirement, they are being hit with more austerity, with little to no choice in how they manage these additional financial pressures.

The decision to remove this crucial support was not part of the Government's manifesto, and it has shaken the public's trust in the political system. We know from the thousands of workplaces we cover that when a significant financial or policy decision is made in the public sector, an Equality Impact Assessment is completed by any employer. To discover, that no assessment was completed by the Government ahead of this decision, is deeply worrying. It is also especially troubling when promises are broken, and policies are introduced without the transparency and integrity we expect from our elected officials.

While many in the general public would accept that millionaires should not receive the Winter Fuel Allowance, a key tenet of the welfare state has long been universalism where possible, such as with the NHS and education, as we know that those who are often the most vulnerable too often are also those who do not claim additional benefits for which they are entitled. For the sake of stopping the wealthiest in retirement from accessing a benefit, we risk hurting the most vulnerable.

We appreciate the need to run a budget that is as balanced as feasibly possible. For many of our members, and your constituents, we do not believe that the cost of this burden should be felt so egregiously by those who have retired. In many cases there are pensioners who receive only a few pounds in income placing them just above an arbitrary line; I spoke to one concerned MP last week who revealed that if their constituent, a pensioner, received £2.24 less in income then they would qualify. There is a lot of space between people in these positions and millionaires.

Regional Secretary: Warren Kenny

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Each community faces different challenges, and it is unjust to enforce blanket policies that do not take into account the varying levels of poverty and hardship. MPs should have the freedom to represent their constituents without fear of retribution. This Labour Government is hopeful of holding onto dozens of seats with very small majorities, but this is not a good step, as I am sure you can see from your mailbags and inboxes. We live in a time where reputations are hard won but easily lost, and people did not elect heartless managerialism into power, they elected the Labour Party.

As we move towards the next budget, we urge you to ensure that pensioners are at the forefront of your considerations. These individuals deserve more than to be sidelined in decisions that will affect their health and wellbeing. It is crucial that future decisions prioritise their basic needs, ensuring that they are not left in financial or physical jeopardy. If we are lucky, we will all grow old.

I know many MPs who are deeply uncomfortable about being put in this position and several who have spoken out behind the scenes, we encourage you all to find your voices when such hurdles are faced again.

We look forward to hearing your stance on this issue and working together to ensure that no one is left behind.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Warren Kenny".

Warren Kenny
Regional Secretary

#MembersFirst