

# CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



## Department for Communities Covid-19 Support

**From:** Sharron Russell, Director, Voluntary and Community Division

**To:** Stakeholders and Partner Organisations

**Date:** 14 January 2021

### Department for Communities Covid-19 Support

We recognise that there is lots of help and support available for people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to provide some clarity around the various offerings we have updated our content on nidirect today. I have added the link here for your convenience: [Financial help and practical support](#) >>

We are aware that there have been lots of calls to our COVID-19 Community Helpline about support available to keep warm and requests for help with heating and fuel. Indeed we are conscious that many calls are being made to council and other partner organisations too. Whilst there is support available for those struggling to keep warm we wanted to clarify that support varies depending on circumstances and in some cases individuals must meet specific eligibility criteria.

We have outlined the various supports and services available below:

### COVID-19 Heating Payment

The Department has put in place a one-off heating payment for those people who are in receipt of Pension Credit, or are in receipt of certain disability benefits (at the higher rates) in recognition of additional costs arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Eligibility criteria does apply and the full details are available on nidirect. For those who are eligible, the Covid-19 Heating Payment will be a one-off payment of £200 paid automatically into the same account to which they

receive their usual benefit payments. The Covid-19 Heating Payment is in addition to any other payments, including the Winter Fuel Payment and will be paid at the end of January 2021. People do not need to apply for this payment.

[Find out more about the COVID -19 Heating Payment >>](#)

### **Discretionary Support**

Another avenue of support may be through Discretionary Support. This is support to help those in a crisis situation and who need emergency help or support with living expenses. Eligibility criteria applies and more details can be found in nidirect:

[Find out more about Discretionary Support](#)

If you have been advised that you are not eligible for Discretionary Support or any other support including the COVID-19 Heating Payment you should contact the COVID-19 Community Helpline. You will be asked to demonstrate that the need for assistance has arisen as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and provide evidence that you are struggling to afford heating/fuel costs.

### **Warm Well Connected**

In December we launched the 'Warm Well Connected' Programme. There appears to be some confusion around the 'warm' element of this scheme with expectations about what it has to offer being misinterpreted. The Warm element aims to provide help and support to those whose wellbeing has been impacted by cold conditions and those in the most extreme need. In some cases help with essential white goods may be available.

Under this programme help is only available for those who have not been able to get help anywhere else and whose finances have been directly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not monetary nor will vouchers be provided. Support will be small in value and only for those in extreme need who are unable to heat their homes by any other means.

Whilst we want to help people as best we can it is vital that those who are in the most extreme need category are supported through this scheme. We would ask that councils and partner organisations are mindful of these factors when signposting individuals as we want to ensure the support reaches those in greatest need.

### **Cold Weather Payments**

In recognition of the cold weather and increased costs associated with heating a home the Department also has in place its Cold Weather Payment. This payment is triggered as a result of Cold Weather and is paid automatically to those who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit and live in a postcode area where the temperature is, or forecast to be, zero degrees or below for seven consecutive days.

People can find out more and check if their postcode is in an area due to receive payments triggered by cold weather by going to nidirect.

[Information about Cold Weather Payments and Post Code Checker >>](#)

**Annual Winter Fuel Payments** In addition to this support you will already be aware of the Annual Winter Fuel Payments made to those people over the age of 65 and these have been and continue to be issued in the normal way. These payments are non COVID related payments. [Further Information on Winter Fuel Payments >>](#)

### **COVID-19 Community Helpline**

We continue to operate the **COVID-19 Community Helpline** and advisers are on hand to connect people to local support networks who can assist with accessing not only fuel but food, medicines and psychological support services. Advice is also available to help tackle underlying issues such as employment, debt, and access to social security support. The helpline has had a significant increase in call volume and emails in recent days many of which are related to fuel.

We would ask that you advise people to visit nidirect in the first instance to check out what help and support is available before contact the helpline. This may assist in getting them the right support much more quickly.

Once again, thank you all for your help and support.

**Sharron Russell**



Department for

**Communities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

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