



Cold Weather Payments for winter 2012/2013

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Cold Weather Payments are made from the Social Fund to certain recipients of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or Pension Credit during periods of very cold weather. To 'trigger' the payments, the average temperature at a specified weather station must be recorded as, or forecast to be, 0°C or below for seven consecutive days. The scheme runs from 1 November to 31 March each winter.

The payment is a fixed amount for each week of cold weather. For many years this was set at £8.50 a week but the Labour Government increased the rate to £25 a week as a temporary measure for winters 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. The current Government has made the £25 rate permanent. For Winter 2011/2012, 5.2 million individual payments were made worth a total of £129.2 million.

Payments are made automatically to those entitled to them. There should be no need to make a claim, but people who think they may be entitled but do not receive a payment should contact the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Library Social and General Statistics Section receives daily reports throughout the winter from the Department for Work and Pensions on which areas have 'triggered' Cold Weather Payments. In previous years a search facility has also been available at the Directgov website (now GOV.UK) which people could use to check if payments have triggered for their postcode area.

Further background on the scheme can be found in Library standard note SN/SP/696, [Cold Weather Payments](#). Information is also available at [GOV.UK](#), and the DWP website has a series of [Frequently Asked Questions on Cold Weather Payments](#).

Cold Weather Payments are entirely separate from both the Winter Fuel Payments scheme and the annual '[Christmas Bonus](#)' paid to pensioners and claimants of certain other benefits.

This note covers the Cold Weather Payments scheme in Great Britain. A separate but equivalent scheme exists in [Northern Ireland](#).

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1 Who is eligible for a Cold Weather Payment?

A person is eligible for a Cold Weather Payment if:

- they or their partner receive Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-related Employment and Support Allowance (in the assessment phase) for at least one day in the period of cold weather **and**:
 - they have a dependent child aged under five; or
 - they are in receipt of a pensioner, disability, severe disability or disabled child premium; or
 - they are entitled to Child Tax Credit for a child or qualifying young person who is disabled or severely disabled; **or**
- they or their partner receive Pension Credit or income-related Employment and Support Allowance (main phase).

People who live in residential or nursing care and who receive a residential allowance are not however entitled to Cold Weather Payments.

2 How are payments 'triggered'?

Cold Weather Payments are made to eligible benefit claimants who live in postcode districts linked to Met Office weather stations which have recorded or forecast periods of severe cold weather (0°C or below) lasting for seven consecutive days.¹ The list of 92 weather stations and their associated postcodes for winter 2012/2013 is in the *Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 2012*.²

A map showing the Cold Weather Payment areas and weather stations in Great Britain is included in the Appendix to this note.

The weather stations used for the Cold Weather Payments scheme, and the postcodes linked to them, are reviewed annually by the DWP. In conducting the review, the DWP takes into consideration representations from Members of Parliament about the suitability of individual weather stations and/or the links with particular postcode districts. Following the 2011 review, three weather stations were withdrawn and the postcodes associated with them were re-assigned to other weather stations. Four new weather stations were also added.³ For 2012, one new weather station was introduced and one was withdrawn.⁴

Further details can be found in DWP Memo DMG 36/12, [Social Fund Cold Weather Payments: Changes to weather stations and postcode districts for winter 2012/13](#) (October 2012).

¹ There are also provisions which allow data from specified alternative stations, or the nearest alternative station, to be used if data from the primary station is not available; see [Schedule 2 of SI 2012/2280](#)

² [SI 2012/2280](#). The *Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2012*; [SI 2012/2379](#), amended the regulations by inserting a further weather station – Rostherne – in the list in Schedule 1. The weather station and its associated postcodes had been omitted from Schedule 1 in error

³ [HC Deb 10 October 2011 c14WMS](#)

⁴ [HC Deb 11 September 2012 c8WMS](#)

The Met Office uses the data from the weather stations to calculate a rolling seven day average temperature, and notifies the Department for Work and Pensions when a particular weather station ‘triggers’, so that payments can be made to eligible benefit claimants living in the associated postcodes.

There are some fairly complicated rules about payments where there are overlapping periods of cold weather. Basically the rule is that if a day has been used once in a calculated period of cold weather it cannot be used again. Thus, if a week of cold weather is recorded ending on a particular day a second payment cannot be awarded until a further complete week had passed, even if the intervening days have ‘triggered’.⁵

The Directgov website has also in the past had a [search facility](#) which people could use to check if their postcode was in an area where payments have been triggered. Directgov has now been replaced by [GOV.UK](#). This also gives information on the [Cold Weather Payments](#) scheme, but at the time of writing there is no link to the postcode search facility (this may be because the scheme does not come into force until 1 November each year).

For Winter 2010/2011, 17.2 million individual Cold Weather Payments were made totalling £430.8 million. In 2011/2012 the winter was milder and just over 5.2 million awards were made worth £129.2 million. Annex 3 of the [Annual Report of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the Social Fund 2011/2012](#) gives statistics on the number of payments and total expenditure in 2011/2012 by Met Office weather station.

3 How are payments made?

Payments should be made automatically to all those who are entitled to them; there should be no need for an individual to make a claim. When Cold Weather Payments are ‘triggered’, it normally takes three working days for payment to be made into the accounts of eligible benefit claimants.⁶

People who think they may be entitled but do not receive a payment should contact the Pension, Disability and Carers Service, or Jobcentre Plus.

The Cold Weather Payments ‘season’ runs from 1 November until 31 March the following year. Claimants who feel they may have qualified for a payment over the winter but did not receive it (e.g. because the birth of a child was not notified to the Department at the time) can make a claim for a backdated payment, provided they do so within 26 weeks of the end of the season. The Government argued that this rule – introduced in 2010 – ‘strikes the right balance between giving the customer time to inform the Department of their circumstances after receiving their winter fuel bills and the administrative cost of retaining records on forecasted and actual periods of cold weather.’⁷

⁵ The rules on overlapping periods are described in greater detail in Vol 7 paras 39700-39714 of the DWP [Decision Maker’s Guide](#)

⁶ HC Deb 11 January 2010 c651w. For the small number of benefit claimants whose claims are maintained clerically, payment takes slightly longer, however.

⁷ [Explanatory Memorandum to The Social Fund Cold Weather Payments \(General\) Amendment Regulations 2010](#), para 7.4

4 What has the current Government done about Cold Weather Payments?

Between 1995 and 2007 the Cold Weather Payment was £8.50 a week for eligible claimants, but on 11 September 2008 the Labour Government announced that as part of its 'energy package' for winter 2008/2009 only Cold Weather Payments would be increased to £25 a week. In September 2009 it was announced that payments would again be made at the higher rate of £25 a week for winter 2009/2010.

Amending regulations are laid before Parliament around autumn each year to make minor changes to the Cold Weather Payments scheme for the coming winter, such as altering postcode to weather station linkages. Amending regulations laid before Parliament on 11 October 2010 made no provision to continue the higher rate, prompting concerns that the level of support would revert to the 'default' rate of £8.50 a week.

On 14 October 2010 *The Guardian* reported that the Prime Minister was 'ready to intervene' to prevent this:

David Cameron is to make a late intervention to block the plans of the work and pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, to cut emergency cold-weather payments worth £25 a week to £8.50.

[...]

In a sign of the confusion surrounding the last-minute haggling before next Wednesday's spending review, one part of Whitehall said there was no possibility of retaining cold-weather payments at £25 a week, saying the payments had been a pre-election bribe by Gordon Brown for which he knew there was no money. The former prime minister had raised the payment from £8.50 a week to £25 a week in the last two years.

However a Number 10 spokeswoman said: "David will not want to see cold-weather payments like these cut back down to £8.50 for some of the most poor and vulnerable in society. He will make sure this does not happen."

A statutory instrument on the payments for this winter, introduced into the Commons on Monday, failed to include the clause specifically raising the weekly payment to £25, so in effect cutting the payment to £8.50.

Other Whitehall sources said the decision on cold-weather payments was wrapped up in a wider review of welfare due to be announced next week. There are suggestions that ministers are reviewing the separate tax-free winter fuel payments, which, at the moment, are given to most people aged over 60. The payments, worth £250 a year, cost a total of £2.7bn.⁸

The Spending Review on 20 October 2010 confirmed that the £25 rate would be made permanent. Press reports before the Spending Review stated that the Chief Secretary to the

⁸ 'Cameron to spare emergency cold weather payments: Plan to cut weekly amount from £25 to £8.50 blocked
Confusion ahead of next week's spending review', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2010

Treasury, Danny Alexander, had managed to 'fight off' plans by the Department for Work and Pensions to reduce the payment to £8.50.⁹

The statutory instrument ensuring that the amount of the payment would continue to be £25 for 2010/2011 and subsequent winters was laid before Parliament on 25th October 2010.¹⁰

⁹ 'RAF mounts offensive to save ageing fleet of Tornado bombers from spending cuts: MoD fights rearguard action against Treasury Question mark over future of newly-ordered carriers', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2010. See also 'Ministers prepare for public outcry as Cameron and Clegg sharpen their axe', *The Times*, 16 October 2010

¹⁰ [The Social Fund Cold Weather Payments \(General\) Amendment \(No. 2\) Regulations 2010](#); SI 2010/ 2591

Cold Weather Payment areas and Met Office stations 2012-13, Great Britain

