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REDUCTION IN WINTER FUEL PAYMENT COULD PUT MOST VULNERABLE PENSIONERS AT RISK AGAIN THIS WINTER

Following the announcement in the Budget yesterday that the Government will be withdrawing the temporary increase to the winter fuel payment, uSwitch.com, the independent price comparison and switching service, warns that the Government needs to ensure it protects the most vulnerable this winter.

Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, says: “The Government needs to understand that pensioners are already concerned about next winter. The withdrawal of the extra payments of £50 for those under 80 and £100 for those over 80, will hit pensioners hard, especially the large number that are living in fuel poverty. This group in particular needs as much help and support as possible from the Government.

“Last December was the coldest in 100^[1] years but 55% of people went without heating at some point during the winter to keep their energy costs down while two in ten (20%) regularly went without^[2]. This year, without extra help, many pensioners will be condemned to another cold miserable winter and may suffer ill health as a result.

“Everyone recognises that the Government does not have a bottomless pit of money, which makes it even more important that any payments, such as the winter fuel payment, are targeted at those who need it the most, such as pensioners in receipt of pension credit. If the winter fuel payment is targeted at them rather than being a universal payment, which is enjoyed by all pensioners regardless of their income, this could enable the very poorest or most vulnerable to be given that little bit more.

“Now this payment has been reduced again it’s more important than ever that households manage their energy bills by paying the lowest possible price for their energy and cutting down on the amount they use through sensible energy efficiency steps and measures.”

For more information visit www.uSwitch.com or call 0800 093 06 07

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For more information please contact:

Jo Ganly, uSwitch.com on 020 7802 2915/ 07940 705777 or joganly@uswitch.com,
Lisa Grando, Lansons Communications on 0207 294 3669 or lisag@lansons.com

Notes to editors:

All research referred to below was conducted with the uSwitch.com Consumer Opinion Panel amongst 1,557 respondents between 27th December, 2010 and 3rd January, 2011. Previous research from last year was also conducted with the uSwitch.com Consumer Opinion Panel amongst 4,734 respondents between 1st March and 5th March, 2010.

1. The coldest winter in 100 years according to The Met Office <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/news/releases/archive/2011/cold-dec> .
2. In response to: ‘How often have you gone without heating this winter so far to keep energy costs down?’ 25% said never, 33.3% said occasionally, 20.3% said regularly and 0.9% said always. $33.3\% + 20.3\% + 0.9\% = 54.5\%$ of people who went without heating at some point this winter so far to keep their energy costs down. Assuming that each person represents one household and on the basis of 26 million households in the UK we estimate that 14,170,000 households have gone cold at some point this winter. This total is over 1 million people greater than the estimate based on the comparable 2010 research which concluded that 49.9% of people went without heating during the winter, equivalent to 12,974,000 households. 12.1% said that they’d regularly gone without heating in the 2010 research.

About us

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial, online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones and personal finance products including mortgages, credit cards, current accounts and insurance. In 2010 uSwitch.com celebrated ten years of saving customers money.

The service is also available via fax and post. Consumers should fax 020 7233 5933 or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street, London, NW1 0DU with their postcode and usage details.

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