

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

MEMORANDUM E (20) 275 (C)

**FROM: CARÁL NÍ CHUILÍN MLA
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITIES**

TO: EXECUTIVE COLLEAGUES

DATE: 8 DECEMBER 2020

**FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER – DESIGNATION UNDER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
ACT (NI) 2009 - COVID-19 HEATING PAYMENT SCHEME**

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to inform the Executive and seek agreement to the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme. The funding for this scheme was approved at the Executive meeting on 23rd November 2020, and I have written to the First and Deputy First Ministers seeking a designation under section 1(4) of the Financial Assistance Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 for The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 to be made and laid at the Assembly.

Background

2. Subject to First and Deputy First Ministers granting designation approval, I propose bringing forward a Covid-19 Heating Payment scheme to provide groups in receipt of specified benefits with financial assistance in recognition of the additional costs arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be done through a one-off Covid-19 Heating Payment of £200 to those who are likely to be adversely affected health-wise if they are unable to adequately heat their homes during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To have the greatest impact, payments should be made when needed most. The Department proposes making the payment at the end of January 2020, thereby

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

providing direct and immediate financial support to meet additional costs at the time these are likely to be highest.

4. In Summary:

- Subject to First and Deputy First Ministers granting designation approval my Department now plans to make the £200 one-off Covid-19 Heating Payment at the end of January 2021. Individuals will be eligible for this payment if, during the qualifying week (Monday 30th November 2020 to Sunday 6th December 2020 inclusive), they are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:
 - Pension Credit;
 - the higher rate of Attendance Allowance;
 - the highest rate care and/or higher rate mobility element of Disability Living Allowance; or
 - the enhanced rate daily living and/or enhanced rate mobility element of Personal Independence Payment.
- Payments will be made on an individual, rather than a household, basis and individuals will only be eligible for one payment, even if they fall into multiple groups.
- Those in care homes will not receive a payment.
- Payments will be disregarded for benefit purposes, excluding tax credits, and may be taxable.
- There will be no right of appeal.
- There will be provision to recover payments made in error.
- There is no application process.
- Payments will be made to those eligible via existing payment channels.

5. The overall cost of the scheme is £44.256m.

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE

6. To ensure that the payment is available to support the eligible groups during this coming winter period which will be compounded by Covid-19, it is planned that payments will be made at the end of January 2021.

Recommendation

7. The Executive is asked to agree:
 - i. That the Covid-19 Heating Payment scheme proceed under section 1(4) of the Financial Assistance Act (Northern Ireland) 2009.

**Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
Minister for Communities**

OFFICIAL - EXECUTIVE