Annual review of the Cold Weather Payment scheme ahead of the 2025/26 season

Richard Ozanne, Anthony Veal

July 2025

If printing double-sided you will need this blank page. If printing single sided, please delete this page

Met Office

Contents

Version Control

Date	Version	Comment
09/07/2025	1.0	First Draft
15/07/2025	2.0	Correction of number of stations from 79 to 78

1. Introduction

This report details a review of the station to postcode linkages used in the cold weather payment scheme.

The design and operation of the social fund cold weather payments (CWP) is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), supported by the Met Office. Met Office supply temperature data on a daily basis during an extended winter season (November to March) in order to determine if the payment criterion has occurred. This criterion is an average temperature at or below 0°C, over seven consecutive days. A mix of forecast temperatures and observed temperatures are used; forecasts to ensure timely payments are made and observed temperature for retrospective payments.

The scheme links groups of postcode districts (e.g., EX1 – EX8) to weather stations that report to the Met Office on a daily basis. The linkages have been made by Met Office using Geographical Information System (GIS) data. The approach takes account of topography, population distribution, climatology, and the distance from available weather stations. Each postcode district is assigned to a nearby station with the most representative climate in relation to the latest 30-year winter mean temperature. Accounting for all these factors means that the assigned station is not always geographically the closest one.

2. Purpose of the Annual Review

The purpose of the annual review is to detail any changes to stations that may need to be made before the beginning of the next Cold Weather Payments season. The report covers the following matters:

- Determining the availability of the existing 78 weather stations covered by the scheme for the period between 1 November and 6 April, i.e., the period during which the Met Office provides temperature and forecast data for the scheme. Note: Since 1 November 2023, DWP requires weather station postcode linkages for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Identification of any substitute stations which are no longer available, or any that will become unavailable between now and the end of March 2026.
- To advise DWP if there are any weather stations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that are not used in the scheme that would be more representative than the existing weather stations or should be included as an additional weather station due to a gap in local sensitivity.
- To assess the impact of any relevant postcode changes provided in the most recent Royal Mail updates, nos. 79 and 80.
- To review enquiries received from MPs during the operation of the past year's scheme, where they query the suitability of assigned stations, and where they ask for a review of assignments or of boundaries between

assigned weather stations. These include enquiries made to DWP and those made directly to the Met Office which resulted in or recommended a review of the weather station within the annual service review.

- To advise whether the linkages identified are the most appropriate for next season's scheme and, if they are not, provide details of more suitable weather station linkages.

3. Updated Station Lists

To provide an updated list of alternate stations for all the 2025 - 2026 season nominated stations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

4. Weather Station Network Changes

A review of known station closures or risks and recent new stations in the Met Office observing network.

Closures

We have not been advised of any station closures in advance of the 2025-26 season

Should any stations become at risk before the start of the season, an updated report will be issued.

New Stations

There are no newly opened stations that we recommend for inclusion in the service.

5. Postcode Changes

We have assessed the postcode changes provided in the most recent Royal Mail update, nos.79 and 80, and have determined that these have no impact on the station linkages.

6. Ministerial Queries

Kate Osborne, MP for Jarrow and Gateshead East - MC2025 03975. Postcode districts NE10, NE31, NE32, NE34, NE35, NE36, NE37, NE8 & NE9.

An Enquiry to enquire about the eligibility of cold weather payments for constituents of Jarrow and Gateshead East.

The House of Commons Library stated that a cold weather payment has been triggered for postcode districts NE10, NE31, NE32, NE34, NE35, NE36, NE37, NE8 & NE9. Constituents in these areas were concerned that the DWP website stated that no cold weather payments have been triggered.

DWP responded that, last year, the Met Office conducted a complete review of postcodes served by Albemarle weather station as part of its annual review and recommended that some postcode districts be reassigned from Albemarle to Morpeth, Cockle Park because their winter mean temperature is best represented by the latter. As a result, the postcode districts NE10, NE31, NE32, NE34, NE35, NE36, NE37, NE8 & NE9, previously linked to Albemarle, were now linked to the Morpeth, Cockle Park Weather Station. This change had not been reflected in the records of the House of Commons Library.

Response

Our recommendation from last year concerning the weather station and postcode linkage updates in this area remains unchanged. In the 1991 to 2020 30-year climatology, Albermarle has a much colder winter mean temperature than the area covered by those postcodes, whose winter mean is better represented by Morpeth Cockle Park.

We recommend that no changes are made to weather station postcode linkage in NE8, NE9, NE10, NE31, NE32, NE34, NE35, NE36 and NE37.

Sharon Hodgson, MP for Washington and Gateshead South - MC2025/05963 Postcode district NE37.

A constituent in NE37 wrote regarding non-triggering of cold weather payments in Washington, NE37, where triggers would have occurred in previous years.

DWP responded that NE37 was reassigned to Morpeth Cockle Park during last year's review because this better represented the winter mean temperature than Albermarle. There were no triggers for Morpeth, Cockle Park during the 2024-25 winter season and there was one trigger for the Albemarle weather station, from Thursday 2 January to Wednesday 8 January. We agreed to review the linkage for the annual review.

Response

NE37 is currently assigned to Morpeth Cockle Park, which has a winter mean temperature of 4.3°C. This weather station is 35km to the North-Northwest of NE37. Albemarle is geographically closer to NE37, at 26km West-Northwest, but has a winter mean temperature 3.7°C. The winter mean temperature of the main built-up areas of NE37 are in the range 4.4-4.7°C. Whilst Morpeth is not geographically the closest weather station, it is the most representative in terms of winter mean temperature and it is recommended that NE37 remains assigned to Morpeth.

We recommend that no changes are made to weather station postcode linkage in NE37.

Julie Minns, MP for Carlisle MC2025/1922. Postcode CA8

Concern from a constituent in Brampton, CA8 that the area is covered by Carlisle and not a by more local station that would be more representative of rural areas of CA8. A review was requested of CA8 and of why the current system does not differentiate between urban and rural areas.

Response

CA8 is currently linked to Carlisle weather station, located 14 km to the west, which has a winter mean temperature of 4.7°C. The CA8 postcode district is largely rural and lies on the western side of the Pennine Hills. Its main town is Brampton, where most residents live, with a winter mean temperature of 3.9–4.1°C. Other settlements include the villages of Hayton (4.0–4.3°C) and Heads Nook (4.0–4.2°C) and smaller communities including Castle Carrock (3.7°C) and Gilsland (3.5°C). The whole of CA8 is therefore colder than Carlisle weather station

Alternative weather stations include Redesdale (2.9°C, 48 km northeast) and Shap (3.1°C, 49 km south). However, both are over three times farther from Brampton than Carlisle. Redesdale is also on the opposite side of the Pennines, a significant topographic barrier, and we generally avoid linking postcode districts to stations across such divides as they would typically experience different weather conditions. While Shap is on the same side as CA8, it is significantly colder than most of the district.

Given Carlisle's proximity, its location on the same side of the Pennines, and its temperature alignment with Brampton, where most of CA8's population resides, it remains the most appropriate weather station for the district, despite CA8 being slightly colder than Carlisle overall.

We recommend that no changes are made to weather station postcode linkage in CA8.

Harpreet Uppal MP, House of Commons - MC2025/06694 Postcode HD4

Concern from a constituent, regarding the HD4 postcode. This was not eligible for payments, when HD7 was eligible. The weather station used for HD4 is Sheffield and the station used for HD7 is one in Bingley. The constituent argues that Huddersfield does not have the same weather as Sheffield, because Huddersfield is located in a valley. Similarly, he argues that HD7 should experience similar weather conditions to, because they are relatively close.

Response

Following an extensive review of postcodes in and around the Spen Valley in this annual review it was recommended that HD4 is reassigned from Sheffield (winter mean temperature 4.8°C) to Bramham (4.3°C). Although Bingley (3.6°C) is the geographically closest station to HD4, HD4 has a winter mean temperature ranging from 3.7-4.7°C which more closely aligns with Bramham. Bingley is deemed too cold to be linked to HD4.

HD7 lies directly to the west of HD4 and is colder, with winter mean temperatures ranging from 3.2-4.5°C. In this case Bingley is deemed the most appropriate weather station for this postcode district as winter mean temperatures align more closely with Bingley than other weather stations. HD7 is closest to both Bingley and Rochdale, but Rochdale is not considered as it lies on the opposing side of the Pennines, a significant topographic barrier, and it is likely that climatic conditions on the opposing side of this barrier will be different.

We recommend that the postcode district HD4 is reassigned from the Sheffield weather station to the weather station at Bramham. We recommend that no changes are made to weather station postcode linkage in HD7..

Andrew Ranger, MP for Wrexham. MC2025/06747 Postcode L11

On behalf of a constituent in Brymbo, L11, who expressed concern that Brymbo, at 233m, is higher than the surrounding areas linked to Hawarden at 9m, and experiences temperatures closer to upland areas further west.

DWP responded that it is not always feasible for the Cold Weather Payments scheme to reflect all the local temperature disparities precisely and that variable terrain increases the complexity of weather station selection. The Hawarden Airport weather station is linked to the following postcode districts: CH1-8, LL11-14, SY14 and the village of Brymbo falls within these districts. There have been no Cold Weather Payment triggers at the Hawarden Airport weather station this season. It was agreed that the situation of such upland villages would be included in the annual review.

Met Office

Response

The LL11 postcode district covers the northwestern part of Wrexham, including several of its suburbs such as Stansty and Gwersyllt, as well as larger surrounding villages like Coedpoeth and Brynteg, and smaller settlements including Brymbo. Whilst central Wrexham lies in a relatively low-lying area, the terrain rises steeply to the west, resulting in several elevated communities. This topographical variation contributes to a notable range of climatic conditions across the district.

Although we acknowledge that some claimants live in more remote, colder locations, our approach to postcode-to-weather station linkages prioritises fairness and consistency for the broader claimant population. As such, greater weighting is given to areas where most residents are concentrated.

Currently, LL11 is linked to the Hawarden weather station, located 12 km to the north, which has a winter mean temperature of 5.1°C. This is the geographically closest station to LL11. Other potential alternatives include:

- Rhyl (5.7°C, 39 km to the northwest),
- Shawbury (4.6°C, 39 km to the southeast), and
- Lake Vyrnwy (3.5°C, 45 km to the southwest).

Winter mean temperatures within Wrexham and its suburbs typically range from 5.0°C to 5.2°C. In contrast, elevated villages such as Coedpoeth (4.2–4.5°C), Brynteg (4.6–5.0°C), and Brymbo (4.3–4.4°C) experience cooler conditions, with even lower temperatures in more isolated communities.

Unfortunately, the current scheme does not permit subdivision of postcode districts, requiring a single weather station to represent the entire area. Given that the majority of LL11's population resides in Wrexham and its suburbs—and considering Hawarden's proximity and climatic similarity—it remains the most appropriate station for this district.

Moreover, within the Cold Weather Payment framework we avoid recommending weather station boundaries that would divide contiguous urban areas, to avoid the situation where residents on opposite sides of a street are treated differently. LL11, LL12, and LL13 collectively serve the Wrexham conurbation, where winter mean temperatures in LL12–LL13 range from 5.1°C to 5.3°C. As such, there is limited justification under the current framework to reassign LL11- LL13 to Shawbury.

We recommend that no change is made to weather station postcode linkage in LL11.

Kim Leadbeater, MP for Spen Valley

Concern that the Sheffield weather station is being used to calculate the temperature within the Spen Valley (West Yorkshire) area rather than a local weather station.

Response

The following response revisits the question and provides a more in-depth answer to that provided by the Met Office on 4th February 2025. That response recommended that a further review should be conducted exploring the postcode linkages in the Spen Valley constituency and that this should take in the surrounding postcode districts, to ensure wider consistency. This response reviews the whole question again and because a more detailed analysis has been conducted some of the original figures have been adjusted accordingly.

The Spen Valley, located south of Bradford and north of the River Calder in West Yorkshire, includes Cleckheaton, Heckmondwike, Gomersal, and Liversedge. The broader Spen Valley parliamentary constituency extends south of the Calder to include Kirkheaton and is the primary focus of this response.

For the 2024–2025 Cold Weather Payments scheme, the constituency was served by two weather stations:

- Bingley covers the northern third (BD4, BD11–12, BD19) apart from Birstall in the northeast corner (WF14).
- Sheffield covers the remainder (WF14–17, HD5).

Four weather stations—Bingley, Bramham, Rochdale, and Sheffield—could potentially serve the Spen Valley constituency. Liversedge and Heckmondwike, near the constituency's centre, are used as reference points:

- Bingley: likes 17 km NW, winter mean temperature 3.6°C
- Bramham: 29 km NE, 4.3°C
- Rochdale: 34 km WSW, 4.4°C
- Sheffield: 38 km SSE, 4.8°C

As Rochdale lies west of the Pennines and the Spen Valley lies to the east, Rochdale is excluded due to differing climatic conditions on opposing sites of the Pennines.

Postcode districts are typically linked to the weather station that best reflects their winter mean temperature, and not necessarily the closest. Bingley is geographically closest to all districts in the constituency, yet only some (BD4, BD11–12, BD19) are currently assigned to Bingley. The winter mean temperature these postcode districts are now considered. A range of temperatures is quoted that cover the main built-up areas within each:

- BD4 (3.8-4.6°C)
- BD11 (3.8-4.2°C)
- BD12 (4.0-4.4°C)
- BD19 (4.1-4.6°C)

Met Office

Whilst all these postcodes are geographically closest to Bingley their winter mean temperatures are generally more closely represented by Bramham which is the second geographically closest weather station in all cases. The main urban areas of all but BD19 have lower winter mean temperatures than Bramham and are typically 4.0-4.2°C***. It is therefore recommended that BD19 moves from Bingley to Bramham and BD4, BD11 and BD12 remain assigned to Bingley.***

We now consider the winter mean temperatures of each postcode district within or partly within the Spen Valley constituency that are currently assigned to Sheffield weather station. A range of temperatures is again quoted that cover the main built-up areas within each:

- WF14 (4.3-5.0°C)
- WF15 (4.3-4.7°C)
- WF16 (4.3-4.7°C)
- WF17 (4.0-4.8°C)
- HD5 (4.1-4.9°C)

Whilst these postcodes are geographically closest to Bingley but are currently assigned to Sheffield, their winter mean temperatures are again most closely represented by Bramham bar the southernmost two districts, namely WF14 and HD5, which are marginally better represented by Sheffield although significant portions of these postcodes do more closely match Bramham. **It is therefore recommended that WF14-WF17 and HD5 are moved from Sheffield to Bramham.**

The above recommendation then leaves remaining Huddersfield postcodes assigned to Sheffield:

- HD1 (4.2-4.9°C),
- HD2 (3.9-5.0°C),
- HD4 (3.7-4.7°C)
- HD6 (4.1-4.8°C))

These are geographically separated from the main block of Sheffield assigned districts and these have temperatures that are best represented by Bramham. **It is recommended that HD1, HD2, HD4 and HD6 are also moved from Sheffield to Bramham.**

The remaining Wakefield postcode districts (WF1–WF13), located directly east of the Spen Valley constituency, are generally closer to Bramham than Sheffield, except for WF9 and WF4, which are roughly equidistant, although the main urban area of WF4 lies nearer to Bramham. Most of these districts have winter mean temperatures between 4.3°C and 5.1°C, although parts of WF4, particularly around Grange Moor, are as low as 3.9°C. Deciding whether to assign these postcodes to Bramham (geographically closer) or Sheffield (more climatically representative in many cases) is finely balanced. However, two main factors support assigning them to Bramham:

- WF1–WF5 and WF12–WF17 form a contiguous urban area spanning Wakefield and Dewsbury and in the Cold Weather Payments scheme we seek, where possible, to avoid splitting such conurbations between weather stations.

- WF14–WF17 are already proposed to be reassigned to Bramham in the earlier discussion.

Given these considerations, along with the proximity of surrounding Wakefield districts (WF6-11) to Bramham, it is reasonable to conclude that Bramham is the most appropriate weather station for all (WF1–WF17) Wakefield postcode districts. ***It is therefore recommended that WF1-WF13 are also moved from Sheffield to Bramham.***

To sum up all proposed changes in the Spen Valley, it is recommended that HD1, HD2 and HD4-HD6 along with WF1-WF17 are moved from Sheffield to Bramham. It is also recommended that BD19 moves from Bingley to Bramham.

7. Updated Station lists

Updated station lists will follow acceptance of the recommended changes.

8. Summary of Proposed Changes for the 2025-26 Season

Postcode/s impacted	Recommended changes to weather stations
WF1-17	Sheffield to Bramham.
HD1, HD2, HD4, HD5, HD6	Sheffield to Bramham.
BD19	Bingley to Bramham