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Contact: Anna Passingham 020 7241 8523 (out of hours Stephen Burke on 07714 334510)

REMEMBER YOUR OLDER NEIGHBOURS DURING THE SEVERE WEATHER

With forecasts of heavy snow tonight and tomorrow across parts of central and southern England and cold weather warnings in place across the country, it is vital that we all keep an eye out for vulnerable older neighbours, family members and friends who may be at greatest risk as a result of the freezing conditions and plunging temperatures.

National charity, Counsel and Care is concerned about the impact of these freezing conditions on frail older people who are living alone or are on fixed incomes. Despite efforts to the contrary, the number of excess deaths during the winter months in England and Wales has increased by a shocking 49% on the previous year¹. Every year, people over 75 experience the greatest increase in deaths directly associated with the winter months².

Counsel and Care, recognises the importance of promoting its advice guide on how to stay warm and safe, and alert to the needs of more vulnerable older people during this time.

¹ There were 36,700 excess deaths during the period of December- March 2008/09, an increase of 49% or over 12,000 on the previous year's total. (Office of National Statistics, November 2009)

² In the winter of 2008/09 there were 29,400 more deaths among those aged 75 and over, compared with levels in the non-winter period. In contrast, there were 7,300 excess winter deaths among those under the age of 75. (Office of National Statistics, November 2009)

Counsel and Care's guide 26: 'Health difficulties caused by hot and cold weather' covers the following topics:

- practical steps that can be taken now to prepare for the winter months
- government grants such as Winter Fuel Payments, Warm Front Grants, Cold Weather Payments and how to apply for them
- how to heat a home efficiently.

Stephen Burke, Chief Executive of Counsel and Care, said: "During this sustained cold spell, everyone must take urgent action to ensure that the most vulnerable older people in our society are safe and warm in times of cold weather and those living alone are not left without vital practical help.

"It is important to remember older neighbours, friends or family members who may be at greater risk of icy pavements or snow on the ground and contact them to offer assistance with running errands, shopping or simply providing a friendly voice.

"We want to make sure that all those older people who are currently struggling to meet high costs of fuel bills claim their Winter Fuel Payment and Cold Weather Payment and receive advice about how to access support with heating their homes effectively."

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Copies of Counsel and Care's winter guide for older people 26: 'Health

difficulties caused by hot and cold weather' can be downloaded from the website at:

http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/assets/library/documents/26_Health_Difficulties_Caused_by_Hot_and_Cold_Weather_2009.pdf, or ordered by calling our publication orderline on 020 7241 8522, leaving details of your name and address.

- The latest Met Office weather warnings are available at:
http://www.metoffice.com/weather/uk/uk_forecast_warnings.html?day=1
- The Office of National Statistics report can be found at:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=574>
- Counsel and Care is a national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. Advice on issues affecting older people and carers can be obtained by calling 0845 300 7585 or emailing advice@counselandcare.org.uk
- Counsel and Care's Advice Service opening hours are 10am-4pm Monday-Friday except Wednesday afternoons.
- More information about Counsel and Care can be obtained from www.counselandcare.org.uk