



More in
Common

Britons' attitudes to high energy bills: the permacrisis that keeps burning

September 2025

Summary

High energy bills have scarred Britain's national mood

Three years of expensive energy bills has hit the British public hard - making Britons, of nearly all income levels, feel stressed and anxious. High energy bills mean many Britons feel that no matter how hard they work, they will never be able to get ahead and enjoy a comfortable life. For many high energy bills mean that life right now is just about surviving and getting by. The struggle and exhaustion created by high energy bills are driving Britain's shattered national mood.

Britons feel the energy crisis is now permanent and have little confidence in government to fix it

60 per cent of Britons don't believe that energy bills will ever become affordable again. Just a quarter believe the government has a plan to bring down energy bills and awareness of government efforts to bring bills down is almost non-existent.

A sense that government is standing by idly as Britons are exploited is feeding the anti-system attitudes that are driving voters away from the established parties.

Insecurity extends beyond those receiving state support - bringing down bills is vital for rebuilding confidence in government

The cost of living crisis has led to an explosion in numbers of the 'just about managing'. Earning enough to be ineligible for government support but not enough to be able to live comfortably, these Britons will react negatively to policy approaches that only focus on redistributing the burden of high energy bills away from the most vulnerable - from whom they feel unfairly excluded.

Research Approach

Quantitative

A survey of 2,000 Britons weighted according to gender and age interlocked, region, ethnicity, 2024 General Election vote and education level.

Fieldwork took place from 15-18 August and full data tables are available on More in Common's website.

Focus Groups

More in Common organised and moderated two focus groups on Wednesday 20 August. Full recruitment criteria is in the appendix.

Focus Group One - Labour to Reform 'Red Wall' waverers in Wolverhampton West

A 'Red Wall' constituency with one of the highest rates of fuel poverty in England and Wales, Labour notionally gained the new constituency from the Conservatives in 2024, but More in Common's July MRP has Reform ahead by 6%. If Labour are to emerge as the largest party at the next General Election, then they must regain support in seats like this.

Focus Group Two - Stevenage Woman waverers

In 2023, Labour Together declared that winning over 'Stevenage Woman' would be pivotal for Labour's efforts to regain the towns and suburbs needed to return back to power. We recruited a group of 'Stevenage Women' who backed Labour in 2024 but are now moving away from the party.



**How have high energy
bills impacted Britons?**

Expensive energy bills are front of mind for Britons

The high cost of living is Britons' top concern and energy bills form a core part of this. In focus groups, asked what the biggest challenge Britain faces is, participants immediately turned to the cost of electricity and gas bills.

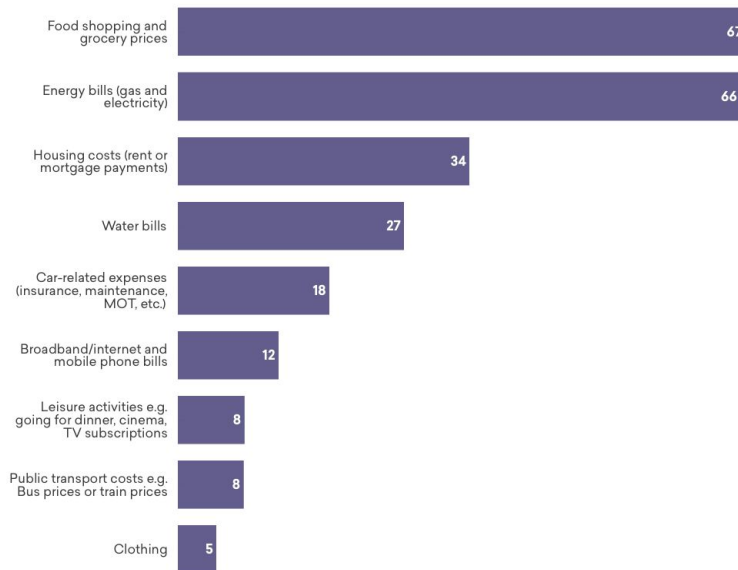
Alongside the cost of groceries, it is the dominant driver of public concern over the cost of living - two thirds of Britons say it is one of their top causes of concern and it is creating angst and stress for Britons of all backgrounds.

There are things we need. We need electric, we need heating in winter, we need weekly food shops, there are things we need and the price, every time you go it seems like the price of everything's going up. Or in the winter, I remember last winter we were like, do we need to put the heat on? We can just put another layer on and you're almost doing silly things to try to get around the bills being so high.

Melissa, Teacher, Stevenage

Concern about the cost of living is driven by food and energy prices

Which of the following are causing you to be most concerned about the cost of living at the moment?
Please select up to three.



Three years of energy bills have made Britons anxious and dejected

The impact of high energy bills on Britons' wellbeing is profound. In focus group conversations, participants said facing these high bills made them feel anxious and dejected. Individuals even spoke of the worry that watching their energy costs tick up through their smart meter created.

Many argued that they had cut out all of the luxury spending they could and so their only way of managing their bills this winter would be to ration their heating and electricity with miserable consequences for their quality of life.

It's quite depressing though, isn't it? Because your home is your castle if you like and you want to go in and feel like if you're working, you want to come home and relax and enjoy your home. But if you're sitting there all wrapped up and you're consciously aware that you can only put your heating on for an hour and you're wrapped up in your hoody and your blankets. I think it affects your mental health, it has got to in some way...

Tamsin, Retired, Wolverhampton

I've had to go onto a smart meter and I hate it. I can actually see how much I've got to pay... it makes me feel crappy to be honest because when you've worked really hard and you're nearly 50 and you're having to go on a smart meter so you can see what you've spent - yeah you want to get better in life, don't you? Not get worse.

Carly, Retail Manager, Stevenage

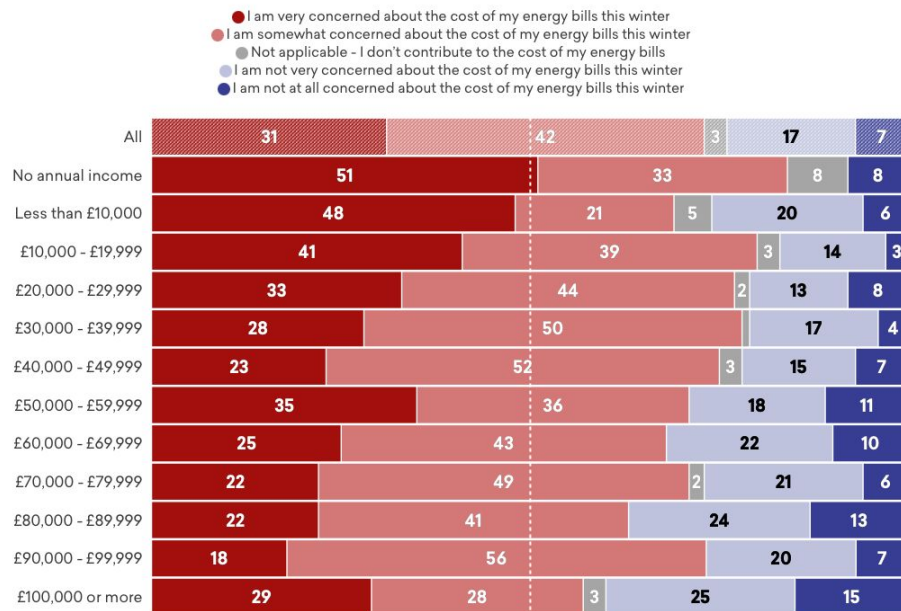
Anxiety about winter energy bills is shared by nearly all Britons

While worries about the impact of energy bills are most acute for those on the lowest incomes, of whom nearly half say they are very concerned, these fears extend across the population. A majority of Britons of all income ranges are either very or somewhat concerned about the potential size of their energy bill this winter.

Concern only drops off among those with a household income in excess of £100,000 - demonstrating how the energy crisis is hurting 'Middle England' as well as those on the lowest incomes.

Britons are worried about energy bills this winter, regardless of household income

Thinking ahead to this winter, to what extent are you concerned, if at all, about the potential size of your energy bill?



High energy bills are impacting Britons' lives beyond the direct financial pressures they are creating

Focus group participants spoke about the pervasive impact high energy bills are having on their wellbeing and quality of life.

In Stevenage, mothers spoke of family arguments over who gets to shower with the, rationed, hot water and how having to explain why the heating can't be turned on to their young children makes them feel powerless. In Wolverhampton, older participants spoke of unhappiness that having worked hard all their life, they now can't enjoy life at home because they can't afford to keep it warm.

28 per cent of Britons say high energy bills have left them with increased stress or anxiety and a fifth say they have to live in a house that is uncomfortably cold. Half say they have experienced at least one of the eight negative impacts tested.

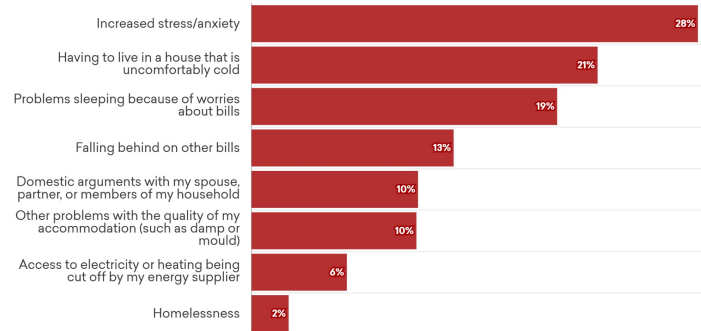
For many focus group participants, fuel poverty isn't something they had experienced before and so to now be unable to heat their homes has made them feel they are going in backwards in life, not progressing.

There's times where we don't have enough [hot water] by the time me and my sons have had a shower. So there's always an argument about who's getting in first because the last one doesn't want the cold water. That is probably quite a frequent argument that happens in my house. It makes me stressed out. As adults we can put the hot water on again and wait 30 minutes but when you've got a 15-year-old teenage boy that wants to just jump in the shower now, he's frustrated and then that obviously impacts the whole house because you've got a stropky 15-year old stomping around.

Lisa, Stay at home Mum, Stevenage

Increased stress and anxiety is the most common impact of high energy bills

Have you experienced any of the following as a result of high energy bills?



Source: More in Common • August 2025

The hot water [rationing] situation doesn't bother me too much because that's how I was kind of brought up as my Mum was a parent on benefits. But when I first moved out to live alone I never faced that so my kids aren't used to that. But obviously now I've gone backwards. I'm living how I was brought up.

Katy, Stay at home mum, Stevenage

I only live with my wife and dogs, but we do take measures instead of putting the heat on, we will go get an extra blanket. We even put jumpers on our dogs just so they're not cold. You're kind of almost scared to put the heat on because you're like, how much will this cost me?

Hattie, Delivery Driver, Stevenage

Britons understand and worry about the wider economic impact high energy bills are having

Focus group participants explained that high energy bills mean they are cutting back on non-essential spending which they also link to the tough environment businesses face. Several Wolverhampton participants said they had seen a decline in customer demand at work themselves which they attributed to this reduction in discretionary spending.

Across both groups, participants argued that high energy costs had a knock on effect in driving up the prices of other goods.

There would likely be strong public understanding and support for a strategy focused on stimulating economic growth by reducing energy costs.

I think people are scared of spending, they may have some spare money, but they're scared of spending it because we don't know what's around the corner(...)just in case a bill drops through the door.

Sam, Transport Company Director, Wolverhampton

That increase in our energy bill is the same increase that Warburtons have when they are baking their bread, so they then have to pass it onto their consumer because they're using more energy to make their products, so they aren't just going to swallow it themselves, so it's everything that goes up, not just our own gas and electric.

Sam, Transport Company Director, Wolverhampton

I noticed that I don't sell kitchens to anybody really, under 35 anymore because they can't afford to buy 'em from us... people are careful with their money because it's always negative headlines which make them really worry about their money

Matt, Kitchen Designer, Wolverhampton



**How are they feeling
about the future?**

Most Britons don't believe energy bills will ever become more affordable

In focus group conversations, there is little hope that energy bills will ever come down. The best many participants could hope for was that bills would stay at a similar level rather than rising even further - with the current situation described as their "new normal."

They saw current high prices as being driven by the greed of energy companies and assumed that even if costs were to come down in the supply chain, there would be little benefit to them as companies now felt they could get away with high prices.

Three fifths of Britons (60 per cent) are not sure energy bills will ever become more affordable with majorities of voters of all parties, except Labour, believing this.

This entrenched financial insecurity and the lack of hope that things will ever get better has serious implications for confidence in government and is driving a 'roll the dice' approach to politics among many Britons.

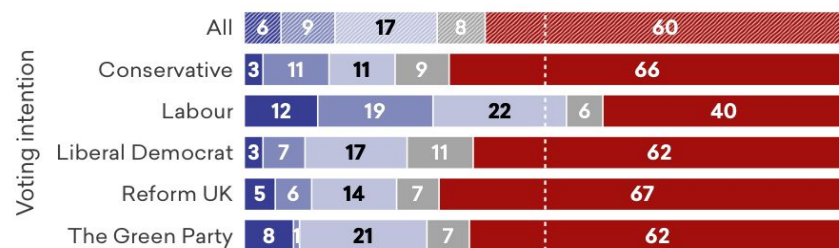
It's not going to happen, is it? Now they sort of get you used to a price they think, 'well, they'll pay it' so no, they're not going to bring it [energy bills] down.

Janet, Art Gallery Manager, Wolverhampton

With the exception of Labour voters, Britons are not sure energy bills will ever become more affordable.

While economic conditions are difficult to predict, when do you expect energy bills to become more affordable?

● This year ● Sometime next year ● In the next few years ● Don't know ● I'm not sure they ever will



More in Common • August 2025

People have managed to pay those prices, so they're just going to keep them at the same price. If you can get people to pay £300 a month more than what they were paying five years ago, and they're still going to continue to pay that, they [the energy companies] aren't going to go, hold on a minute, the pandemic is over, let's lower the costs. We have no choice but to pay this either. We have to live.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

Many Britons are preparing to change their behaviours to help them afford their energy bills this winter

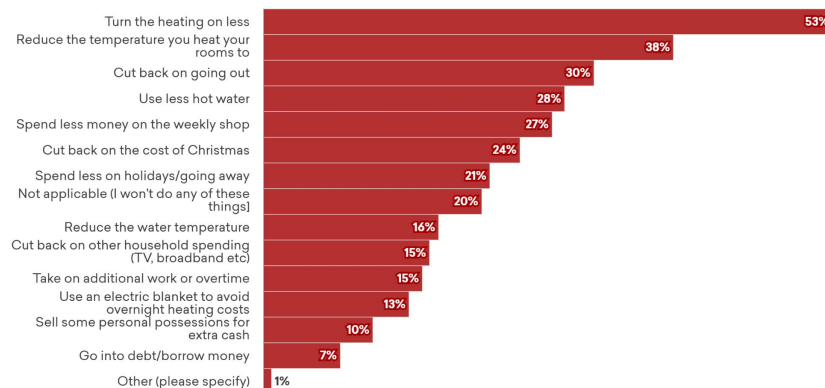
Focus group participants had thought extensively about the steps they could take to reduce their energy bills - for example which rooms they would and wouldn't heat. Yet, no one was confident these measures would be sufficient to shield them from the 'inescapable' impact of their high winter energy bills.

These measures have real impacts on people's lives. Britons are living in colder homes - half (53 per cent) plan to turn the heating on less and around two fifths (38 per cent) expect to heat their homes to a lower temperature. More indirectly, many Britons are having to cut back on non-essential spending - three in ten say they will go out less and a quarter (24 per cent) say they will cut back on Christmas spending.

From focus group conversations, it was clear that having to compromise on their basic warmth and the things that make life nice leaves Britons feeling like they are working to survive rather than to thrive and enjoy life. This is undermining confidence in the social contract - that if you work hard you can enjoy a decent life.

Eight in ten Britons believe they will be forced to take actions to afford their energy bills this winter

Which of the below do you think you might have to do to help meet the costs of your energy bills this winter?
Please select all that apply.



Source: More in Common • August 2025

You're working literally just to survive from week to week or month to month. When you look, reality is, and I say it quite often, I go over the office every single day, I'm out every weekend and I sit there and I try to justify myself doing so many hours because I'm no better off than the bloke that sits in the house all day and just claims the benefits. So you literally just go to work to survive. And that's reality.

Sam, Transport Company Director, Wolverhampton

The attritional effect of three years of high energy bills

During focus group conversations, it became clear that battling high energy prices for three years now has had a cumulative and attritional effect on Britons. Financially, a number of participants spoke of usually having a buffer of credit for winter energy bills - but having had to bear high energy bills for so long this was not the case this year, leaving them vulnerable. Emotionally, the intense pressure to ration their energy usage over the last few years left participants with diminishing resilience and willingness to keep on coping.

This also led many participants to argue there is a need to redefine who is considered as vulnerable and so in receipt of Government support as those who may not have been struggling to pay their energy bills before the spike were now struggling. There was a strong consensus that what it means to be vulnerable and who is vulnerable had radically changed over the last three years.

I've normally built up credit in Summer, but this year I haven't. I'm still in debit by £96, so it's just going to go up. That debt is just going to go up.

Katherine, works in Ophthalmology, Stevenage

I think who is considered the most vulnerable in this country is outdated because I think we're all very, very vulnerable at the moment. I think 20 years ago the most vulnerable would've been the elderly or the people on very low incomes. But we are all on, most of us in this call right now, on very low incomes. But we wouldn't be classed, some of us wouldn't be classed as most vulnerable because we work, but I'm still vulnerable.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage



**Who do people blame for
high energy bills?**

Ukraine seen as responsible for initial bill rise but no longer a valid excuse for high energy bills

In focus group conversations, participants demonstrated strong awareness of the impact of the Ukraine War on energy prices in the UK. Participants intuitively understood its impacts on global energy supply and the consequent price shock this created.

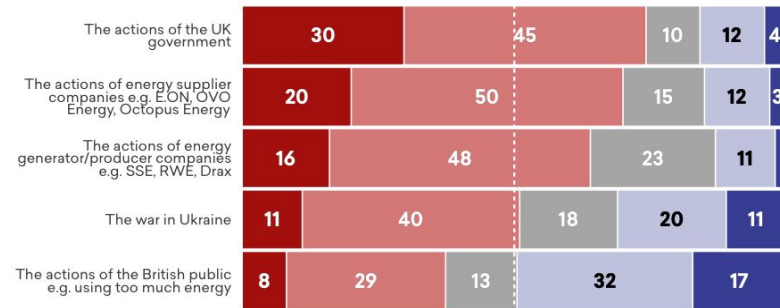
However, three and a half years after Putin's escalation of the Ukraine war, Britons do not believe our high energy bills can continue to be blamed on Ukraine. Looking at energy bills that have barely fallen since the initial spike, they now increasingly blame energy companies and their perceived profiteering - 70 per cent of Britons think energy suppliers are either almost entirely or somewhat responsible for high energy bills, 64 per cent say the same for energy generators, compared to 51 per cent who stay the same for Ukraine.

Britons are unlikely to be persuaded by hearing those in power who seek to explain away Britain's high energy bills by pointing towards Ukraine.

Energy companies and the UK Government are blamed for high energy bills

Please indicate, in your opinion, how responsible, if at all, the following are for Britain's high household energy bills?

● Almost entirely responsible ● Somewhat responsible ● Don't know ● Not very responsible ● Not at all responsible



More in Common • August 2025

I think that Ukraine's just a nice excuse for the energy companies to keep these shareholders nice and happy because when you look at all these big conglomerates like your fuel and energy companies, they're taking massive, massive wages out of there, and yeah it was a great excuse Ukraine, let's just say it's having a massive effect on our fuel prices and whack the prices up.

Sam, Transport Company Director, Wolverhampton

Government is seen as most responsible - either standing aside or worse making bills higher

However, Britons are most likely to view the UK government as most responsible for our high household energy bills - three quarters (75 per cent) say the government is either very or somewhat responsible.

In focus group conversations, participants believed the government could easily take action to reduce energy bills by lowering the price cap but was actively choosing to not do so.

Some also raised concerns the government was actively making bills worse by prioritising the need to decarbonise Britain's energy over the need to bring bills down - pointing to Britain's unwillingness to extract its own domestic fossil fuel energy. Although, previous More in Common [research](#) has found that Britons do think renewable energy can bring down bills.

I think that the war in Ukraine will have affected it, but I think there's a lot of idiots that make these decisions as well. And upper echelons in top management and top government that don't plan for five years ahead or 10 years ahead, they plan for the next quarter or the next election cycle

Matt, Kitchen Designer, Wolverhampton

I mean what about Ofcom [Ofgem], they've got some sort of influence, so I don't believe the government can't step in and do something. I mean, I don't know what, I'm not clever but there are regulations put in place for certain things so surely there's something they can do to sort of cap it in some way because it's getting out of control.

Tamsin, Retired, Wolverhampton



**Do they have confidence
in government to tackle
this?**

Confidence in government to bring down energy bills is limited

Confidence in the government's ability and plans to bring down bills is almost non-existent.

Two fifths (43 per cent) of Britons either think the government has no plan to bring down household energy bills or one that is actively making things worse.

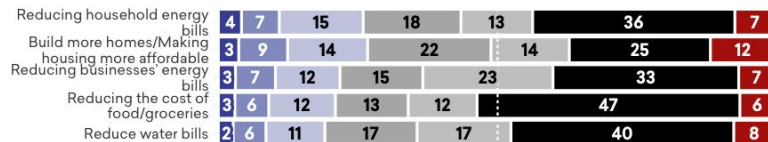
Just a quarter of Britons (26 per cent) have confidence the government has a plan to reduce bills which is ever capable of working and only one in ten think the government has a plan they expect to start working soon.

Voters are not convinced the Government has a plan that will reduce bills

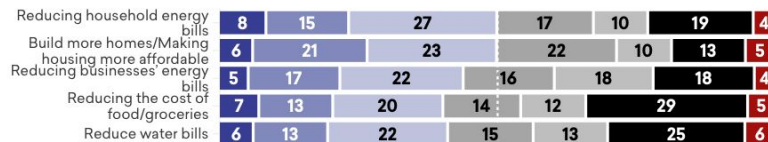
Please indicate the extent to which you think the government has an effective plan to achieve the following:

- They have a plan and it's already working
- They have a plan and it should start working soon
- They have a plan but I have no confidence it will start working soon
- They have a plan but I have no confidence it will ever work
- Don't know
- They have no plan at all
- They have a plan but it's making things worse

All



Labour 2024 voters



More in Common • August 2025

They're not going to bring bills down. They can't run the country and they're not thinking of the common man. They've not got our best interests at heart so why are they going to look after us and reduce any costs at all?

Janet, Art Gallery Manager, Wolverhampton

Few have seen or heard of any form of government action to bring bills down

Across two focus group conversations, not a single participant could point to anything they had heard or read about the government's plans to reduce energy bills.

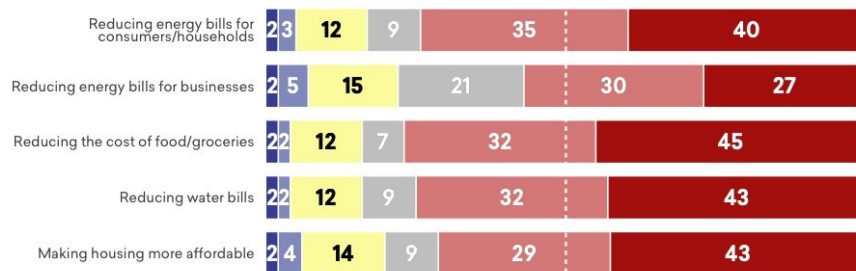
Three quarters of Britons say the government is doing too little to reduce household energy bills with just one in ten saying it is doing the right amount.

As far as many Britons know, the government is doing little to nothing to bring energy bills down.

People feel the government is not doing enough to reduce bills

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think the current government is doing too much, too little, or the right amount?

- The government is doing far too much
- The government is doing too much
- The government is doing the right amount
- Don't know
- The government is doing too little
- The government is doing far too little



More in Common • August 2025

I think if they are doing something about it, we don't know about it. Which is again, not great because we are the people of this country. If they are doing something about it, everybody on this call or at least half of us should know but no one knows anything.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

Covid and Energy bill support scheme has created an expectation of government intervention

There has been considerable debate about whether government intervention to support Britons during the pandemic and the energy bill spike of 2022 has created an expectation among Britons that government should be ready and willing to step in when things become too hard.

In both Stevenage and Wolverhampton focus group participants expected, as a minimum, the government to step in and cap prices.

They saw Britain's high energy prices as a straightforward issue. They believed the government could and should step in and cut prices by setting a lower cap with minimal recognition of any tradeoffs or constraints on the government's ability to do this.

I think the government are responsible. They're the ones who are in charge of the country. They can put caps on how much energy companies charge and I think they don't get it because they're so rich.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

The government can cap the prices but they're not doing it. If there was an overall cap that was lower than by law all of the energy companies would have to follow it.

Melissa, School teacher, Stevenage

When you talk about the shareholders, they should put some sort of a cap on what [profits] they're allowed to have. Put something back into the company or make our bills less. Why do they keep earning such fantastic profits at our expense?

Tamsin, Retired, Wolverhampton

With no intervention, Britons think those in power either don't care about or stand to benefit from high energy bills

From focus group conversations, it was clear the public believe the following:

- Energy bills are having a hugely negative impact on ordinary Britons' lives.
- The government is doing little to nothing to bring bills down.
- It would be simple for government to cut bills by lowering the price cap.

These beliefs are harming Britons' perceptions of government. In the focus groups, participants sought to explain the government's deliberate inaction as:

- Those in power being so far removed and insulated from energy bill rises due to their high incomes that they can't understand the impact it is having on Britons and so don't care.
- For a smaller group, that politicians are benefiting personally from Britons' high energy bills - either through personal enrichment or because it would generate more tax revenue, easing fiscal pressures.

It doesn't affect them. I don't think Keir sits at home and thinks, oh my god, I better not put the heating on today because I can't afford to pay my bills. It does not affect them.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

Well it's the same with COVID, we were all stuck in our houses and they were partying. They didn't care. It wasn't affecting them.

Lisa, Stay at home mum, Stevenage

They don't care. They're not feeling it are they.

Chloe, Accountant, Stevenage

They've got to be making something from it for me. Like someone said, I think if the government wanted to step in and help the option is there for them to do so and put a stop or make it cheaper.

Ben, Transport Planner, Wolverhampton



**How is this impacting
politics and confidence in
the government?**

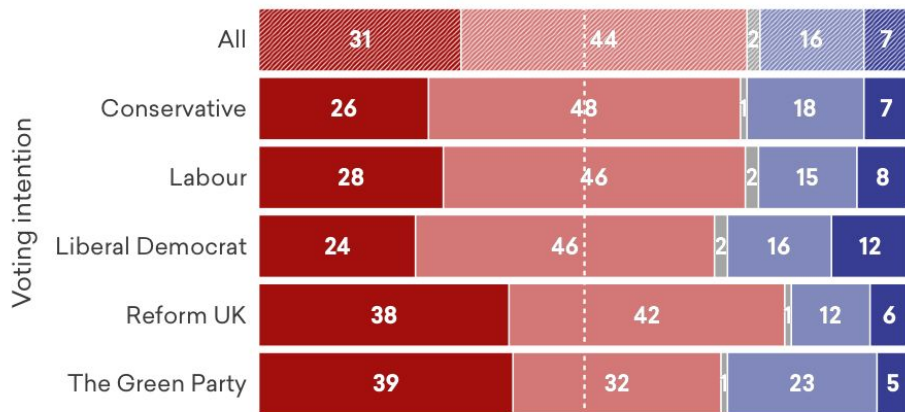
Concern about energy bills cuts across party lines but is strongest among Reform voters

Voters of all political parties are concerned about the impact of high energy bills but concern is strongest and most profound among those intending to vote for Reform UK - 80 per cent of whom are either very or somewhat concerned about the potential size of their energy bills this Winter.

Reform and Green voters are the most concerned about this winter's energy bills

Thinking ahead to this winter, to what extent are you concerned, if at all, about the potential size of your energy bill?

- I am very concerned about the cost of my energy bills this winter
- I am somewhat concerned about the cost of my energy bills this winter
- Not applicable - I don't contribute to the cost of my energy bills
- I am not very concerned about the cost of my energy bills this winter
- I am not at all concerned about the cost of my energy bills this winter



Failure to drive down energy bills is feeding into the perception that government is incapable of addressing Britain's core challenges

A sense the government is either ignoring or incompetently handling Britain's high energy costs is driving the collapse in public confidence in the ability of government to improve Britons' lives.

Of the many issues focus group participants had little confidence in the government to address, energy bills was the one they felt impacted them most personally.

The anger at the failure of government to take action is seeping into a wider feeling that mainstream politics and politicians are incapable of addressing Britain's challenges.

The extent of personal concern over energy bills is strongly linked to anti-system and populist beliefs - half of those most concerned about the impact of energy bills this winter are open to letting all of Britain's political and social institutions burn compared to just one third of those who are not concerned about the price of energy this winter.

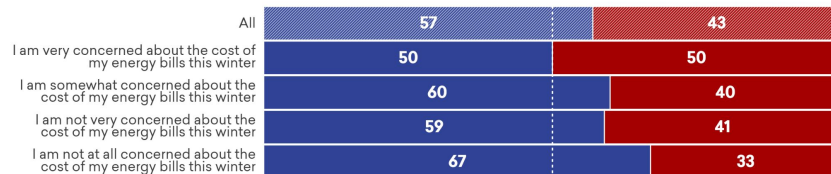
Ofcom and Ofgem are government run facilities, but we already know that the government can't run anything. So that is just one arm of the government that can't do their job. Basically pretty much every arm of the government is no good end of!

Sam, Transport Company Director

Those worried about energy bills have the least faith in our political and social institutions

Which comes closest to your view?

● Our Political And Social Institutions Are Worth Preserving And Improving, Not Destroying.
● When I Think About Our Political And Social Institutions, I Cannot Help Thinking "Just Let Them All Burn."



More in Common • August 2025

I don't hear very much going on from the government trying to help us to be honest. Tell me if I'm wrong, but I don't really hear anything. You hear that bills are going up or you hear that this company's made this much profit, but I never hear really much about what the government is doing. It's not really a big talking point, is it?

Lisa, Stay at home Mum, Stevenage

Keir Starmer promised a lot didn't he. But he hasn't followed through. So you can say whatever you like when it comes to the election, but the proof in the pudding is once you're in there do you follow through with what you actually promised. And I don't feel he's done anything that he's promised.

Pete, Care Home Coordinator, Wolverhampton

Failure to bring bills down is undermining Britons' confidence in Labour's ability to bring the change they promised at the last election

Previous More in Common research has shown that voters' conviction that Britain needed change rather than continuity drove Labour's General Election victory.

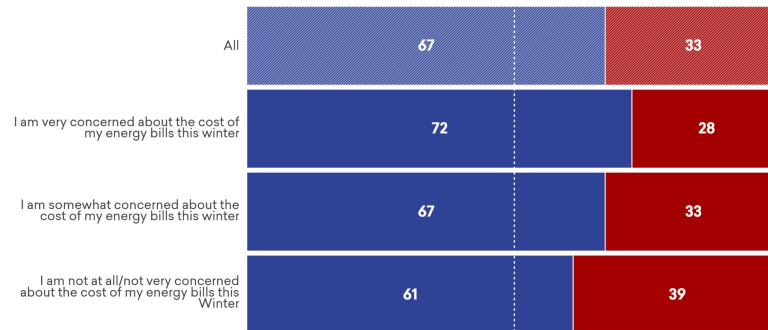
However, it became clear from focus group conversations that a perceived failure to take action to reduce energy bills, and the cost of living more broadly, is derailing confidence in Labour's ability to deliver the change they promised. Our participants said they felt there had been no difference following the change in government - both in their confidence in government and their own ability to manage their high bills.

Indeed, those who are very concerned about their energy bills this winter are 11 percentage points more likely than those not concerned to say that compared to the previous government, the new Labour government feels like more of the same - a failure to ease Britons' energy bill concerns is, at least partially, undermining confidence that Labour is capable of delivering the promised change that was fundamental to its election victory.

Those with the highest concern about their energy bills are the most likely to think Labour has failed to be a government for change

Compared to our previous Conservative government, would you say that our new Labour government...

● Feels like more of the same ● Feels genuinely different



More in Common • August 2025

They, Labour, don't give you faith. You were very hopeful, you just thought in 2024 they would come in and do something to change things but they've just been shambolic.

Pete, Care Homes Coordinator, Wolverhampton

A feeling that those in power don't care about the impacts of energy bills is pushing Britons towards alternatives - even if they aren't confident they will be any better

It is clear from More in Common's wider research, and our focus group conversations, that a sense there is 'nothing to lose' is driving many Britons to vote for Reform - as Labour have, in their eyes, shown themselves to be incapable of delivering the change Britain needs.

In focus group conversations, participants were unsure whether a Reform UK government would deliver a reduction in bills but they did believe the party and its leader Nigel Farage better understand and care more about the impact that high energy bills are having on Britons' lives.

Given their belief the current government is unconcerned, the fact Reform appear to care about high energy bills and are willing to rock the boat was enough to make many participants feel they are worth a gamble.

We had the Conservatives who failed. Now we've got Labour, we've realised they [the Conservatives] aren't actually as bad as what Labour are now. So what do you do next?

Sam, Transport Company Director

He [Nigel Farage] is very personable and I think he probably understands more than anyone out of the government I guess what we are going through as normal people.

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

I'm not sure if Farage would bring down our energy bills because all I've seen Farage talk about is immigration. I don't know what his other plans are.

Sophie, Support Worker, Wolverhampton

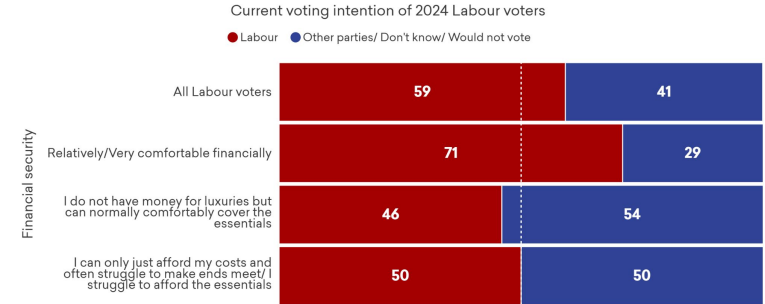
The financial insecurity that high energy bills is feeding into is damaging Labour's ability to retain its 2024 voters

While Labour is only retaining around three fifths of its 2024 voters, retention is even lower among those who are financially insecure. Labour is retaining just 50 per cent of its voters who say they can't afford their essentials or can only just afford their costs and often struggle to make ends meet, compared to 71 per cent of their voters who are either very or relatively comfortable financially.

A similar pattern emerges when looking at energy bills specifically as Labour is retaining 57 per cent of its voters who are either very or somewhat concerned by their energy bills this Winter compared to 68 per cent of their voters who are either not very or not at all concerned. Labour's retention rate among those selecting energy bills as one of their top cost of living concerns is also statistically significantly lower than it is for those who don't.

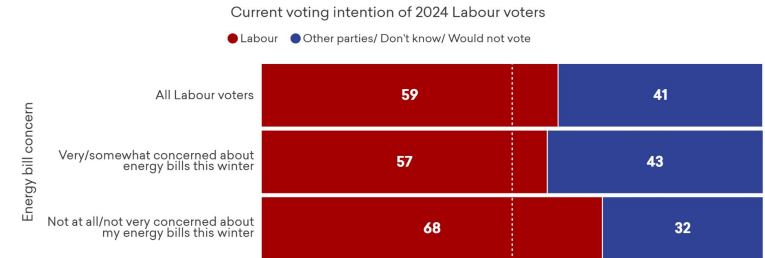
It may be premature to say high energy bills alone are directly causing Labour to lose voters but, at the very least, the continued financial insecurity bills are driving is clearly a key reason for Labour's lost support.

Labour is retaining far fewer of its voters who are financially insecure



More in Common • August 2025

Labour is retaining fewer of its voters who are more concerned about their energy bills this Winter



More in Common • August 2025



Principles to inform the design of policy solutions

Focus on cost reduction rather than shifting the burden of pain

In both focus group discussions, participants were asked if they believed the government should focus on alleviating the pressures created by energy bills through supply-side reforms (bringing down costs for everyone) or through targeted subsidies for the most vulnerable.

There was a clear consensus that the government should focus on bringing down costs for all rather than subsidising the fuel bills of the vulnerable. This was in part driven by perceptions that given excess profit making by the energy companies, there is plenty of fat to cut and so a real opportunity to drive down energy costs.

None of the participants had any real understanding of the difference between energy generators, transmitters and suppliers. They viewed them as one and the same and equally culpable for the excess profits being made in the sector.

Overall, it was clear participants wanted the government to focus on bringing down costs rather than just subsidising the vulnerable and that they believed policies and reforms to drive down costs should be systematic, bringing down the prices which generators, distributors and suppliers charge rather than just what vulnerable consumers end up paying.

I think the government should focus on bringing down everyone's energy bills and treating people equally. I work part-time and I'm on my own but because I earn over a certain amount, I'm not entitled to help. I struggle, just cause I work part-time and others don't work at all, why should I not receive support but others do because they are not working?

Katherine, works in ophthalmology, Stevenage

The government should focus on bringing down the costs for everyone. 100%.

Sophie, Support Worker, Wolverhampton

Many more people feel they are vulnerable than those who are receiving government support for their energy bills.

At the heart of this strong feeling against targeting action at supporting those who are least well off was a sense that the definition of vulnerability, and eligibility for support, has not kept up with the growing pressures that persistent high energy bills have created.

Nearly all participants spoke of the profound impact high energy costs have had on their wellbeing and how hard they have had to work to cover the bills and the tough choices they have had to make to enable this.

They were frustrated by the suggestion that they weren't vulnerable or in need of help and explained the focus only on supporting those on benefits made them feel that those in power either didn't understand or didn't care about the struggles they face and showed a disrespect for their contribution.

I work and my husband works and we're still struggling. I don't understand how that's even possible.

Chloe, Accountant, Stevenage

I don't think it's fair to say what it means to be vulnerable now is what it was like 10 years ago.

Melissa, Teacher, Stevenage

No matter how hard you work though, you've never got enough money to cover everything ever. Especially if you're a single parent. It's crazy.

Caroline, Retail Manager, Stevenage

Proposals to increase bill charges to fund support for the most vulnerable could generate strong opposition

Focus group participants were told there would be a small increase in their energy bills this winter to fund an expansion of Warm Homes Discount Scheme - none of them were previously aware of this.

Respondents were shocked and annoyed that despite their own struggles to pay their energy bills they would now have to pay even more to fund others' bills. Some immediately questioned why energy companies couldn't use their profits to fund these reductions.

A more fundamental objection, raised repeatedly across both groups, was whether those receiving support merited it.

Participants argued many of those they knew receiving support were playing the system, either by gaming the criteria for PIP or choosing not to work and depending on the state. Exasperation was also raised at the fact that while they had to work hard to pay their bills, asylum seekers staying in hotels would have theirs paid for by the state with some suggesting the money spent on this was inhibiting the government from having the resources to take action to bring down bills.

This sense that their struggles were being ignored, and they were even being asked to pay more, while support was being provided to those who didn't work hard to deserve it provoked insult and deep anger. Policymakers should be conscious of this when designing redistributive policy interventions in the energy market.

So basically we are going to pay for other people to be able to heat their home, while we can't afford to heat our homes. Amazing. It's just mental who comes up with this crap? Do they just sit there? Is the government going to be paying an extra 15 pounds out of their wages to help this as well? Or is it just us bloody robots?

Sarah, School Child Protection Officer, Stevenage

So we'll have to pay so someone in a hotel somewhere is really warm?

Lisa, Stay at home mum, Stevenage

I've worked hard enough. I've grafted my ass off since I was 13 and I'm not paying for somebody else. They need to graft their ass off as well.

Janet, Art Gallery Manager, Wolverhampton

It's really demoralising. It means you literally don't want to try harder...the more you do handouts for being a vulnerable person or being in this category or that category, the more you're just incentivizing people to, rather than strive, you'll just say, oh mate, give me a break. There's this wrong with me. There's that wrong with me. Somebody could have been like a winner. You're kind of incentivising them to be a loser instead. That's not right.

Matt, Kitchen Designer, Wolverhampton



Conclusion

Key takeaways

Westminster may have moved on but the energy crisis continues to hurt Britons

Britons have had to endure high energy bills for over three years and while the attention of many in Westminster has been diverted elsewhere - it continues to hurt ordinary people and is a dominant concern

The impact of energy bills is more than financial - it's harming Britons' family lives and wellbeing

The impact high energy bills is having on Britons is profound. It is causing family arguments, denting Britons' pride in themselves and driving deep stress and anxiety with little room left for enjoyment and pleasure in their lives

Britons feel those in power don't care about the impact high energy bills are having

Britons think very little, if anything at all, is being done to bring down energy bills and so feel those in power don't understand or care about the impact high energy bills are having on their lives

High energy bills are driving discontent and a loss of confidence in government

Low public confidence in their ability to reduce energy bills is driving a broader feeling that government is incompetent and incapable of making Britons' lives better. This is driving anti-system sentiment

Focus on bringing down bills for as many Britons as possible - not just the most vulnerable

Unless the government expands those in receipt of support, focusing its efforts only on reducing the burden for those who currently qualify for benefits risks angering the many Britons who feel deeply vulnerable but aren't currently eligible for support

Develop a clear plan for bringing bills down in the short-term and get talking about it

Public confidence and awareness of the government's actions to reduce bills is almost non-existent. To quell discontent there is a need to develop and show a clear plan to reduce energy bills, in the short-term, and communicate this to Britons

Chris Annous & Archie Herrick

Contact: chris@moreincommon.com



**More in
Common**

Editorial information

This report forms part of More in Common's wider work on Britons' attitudes towards the cost of living and energy.

The survey and focus groups referenced in this report and the writing of this report has been funded by Octopus Energy.

More in Common has maintained, as is the case for all of our partnership work, full editorial independence when conducting this research and writing this report. The views expressed within this report are therefore the views of More in Common.

The full survey and data tables can be found on our website and the recruitment criteria used for the focus groups is outlined in the appendix.



Appendix

Focus Group Recruitment Criteria

Focus Group One

- All to be residents of Wolverhampton West constituency
- Mixture of ages and genders and income levels
- From C1,C2,D and E socioeconomic grades
- All voted Labour in 2024
- Voted mixture of Conservative and Labour in 2019
- Current voting intention is mixture of Reform UK, Conservative OR Labour/Don't Know AND would consider voting Reform UK
- If old enough, either voted Leave in 2016 EU referendum or did not vote.

Focus Group Two

- All to be residents of Stevenage constituency
- All women
- All aged 30-60
- Mixture of Socioeconomic grades and income levels
- All voted Labour in 2024
- Voted mixture of Conservative and Labour in 2019
- Voting intention is mixture of Reform UK, Conservative OR Labour/Don't know AND would consider voting Reform UK