

Social Market Foundation and Public First supported and commissioned by Citizens Advice

The future of energy bills: July 2022 polling

This survey comprised a nationally representative sample of 2,012 adults and was in the field between 19th July and 23rd July 2022.

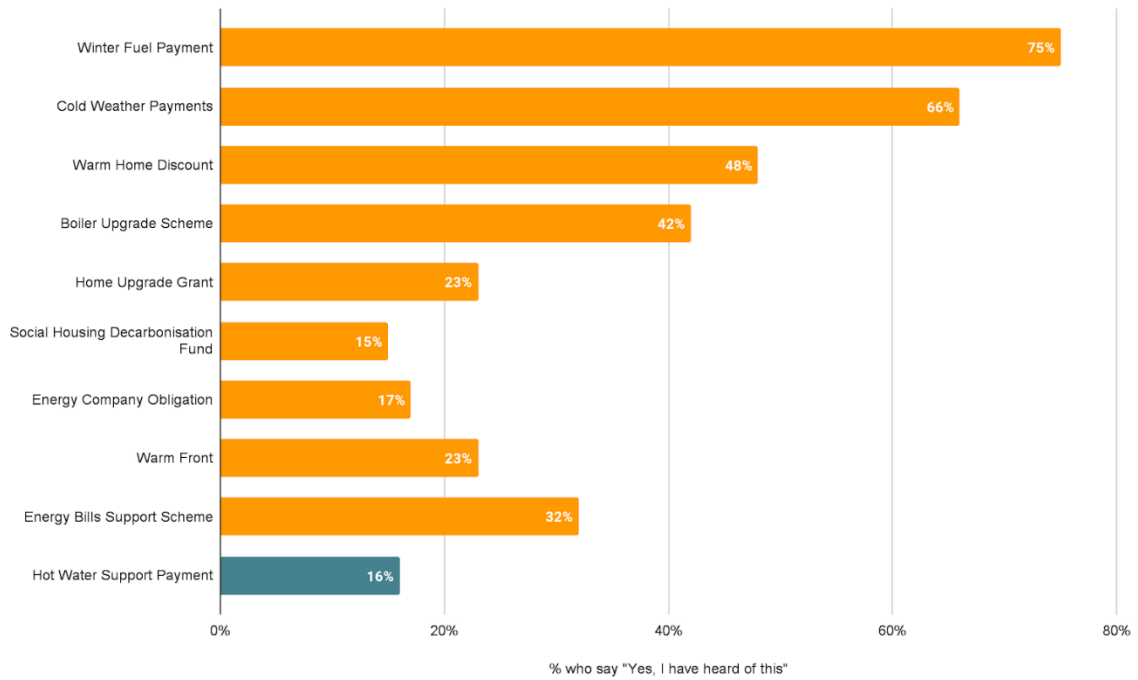
Headlines

- **62%** think that financial support should be made available to help with energy bills, in addition to other forms of support, versus just **21%** who oppose.
- People want government support targeted towards households on low incomes (**50%**), pensioners (**46%**), people with chronic health conditions (**35%**) and people with disabilities (**33%**).
- We found high levels of approval for existing measures, and high levels of support for additional measures, among all age groups, social grades, regions, and across supporters of all major parties.

Energy Bills and the Cost of Living

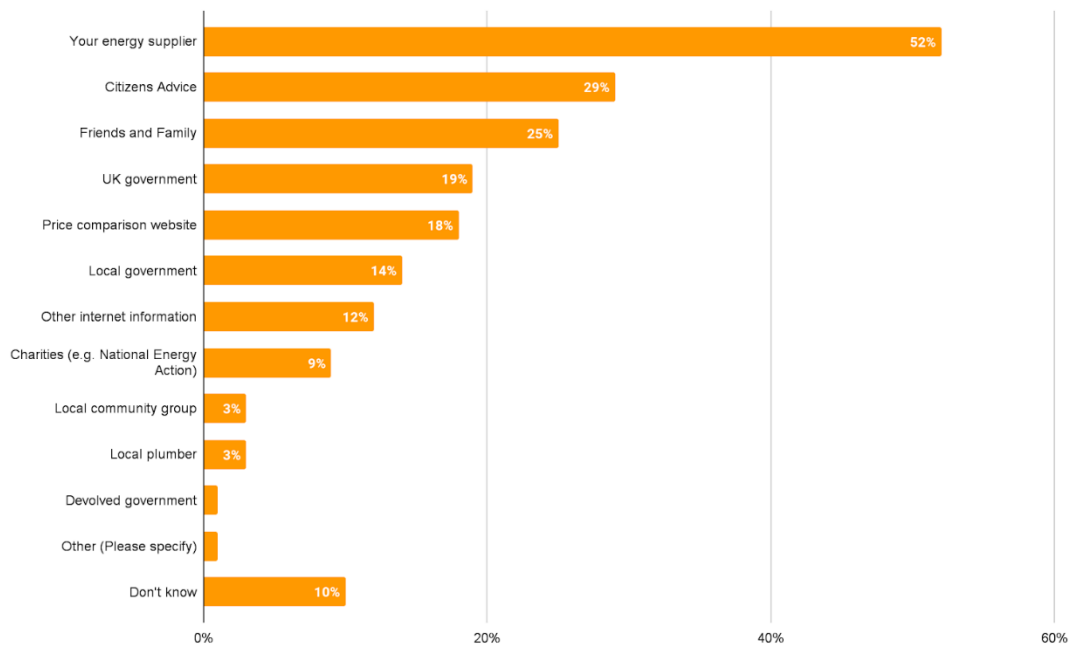
- **38%** of people have switched their gas supplier in the last five years, while **44%** have switched their electricity supplier in the last five years.
- The vast majority of those who switched their suppliers say they generally switch at least once every three years (**68%** for gas, **66%** for electricity).
- **17%** of people said that their electricity supplier has gone bust in the last year - rising to **24%** of Londoners. **49%** of those whose supplier went bust said they had been moved onto a more expensive tariff with a different supplier.

Despite the impact of these bills and the increases people have experienced, a fifth of people (**22%**) admit that they are not confident they know how their energy bills are calculated. We do, however, find higher levels of awareness for energy bill support schemes;



Survey question: There are a number of schemes that are designed to help certain households pay their energy bills. Before today, how familiar were you with the following schemes?

People said they were most likely to approach their energy supplier for advice with their energy bill (**52%**), followed by Citizens Advice (**29%**), and their friends and family (**25%**). Older people (**33%**) and people in lower social grades (**32%**) were more likely to approach Citizens Advice than younger people and those in higher social grades.



Survey question: If you needed help or advice with your energy bill, who would you be most likely to approach for support? Please select up to three.

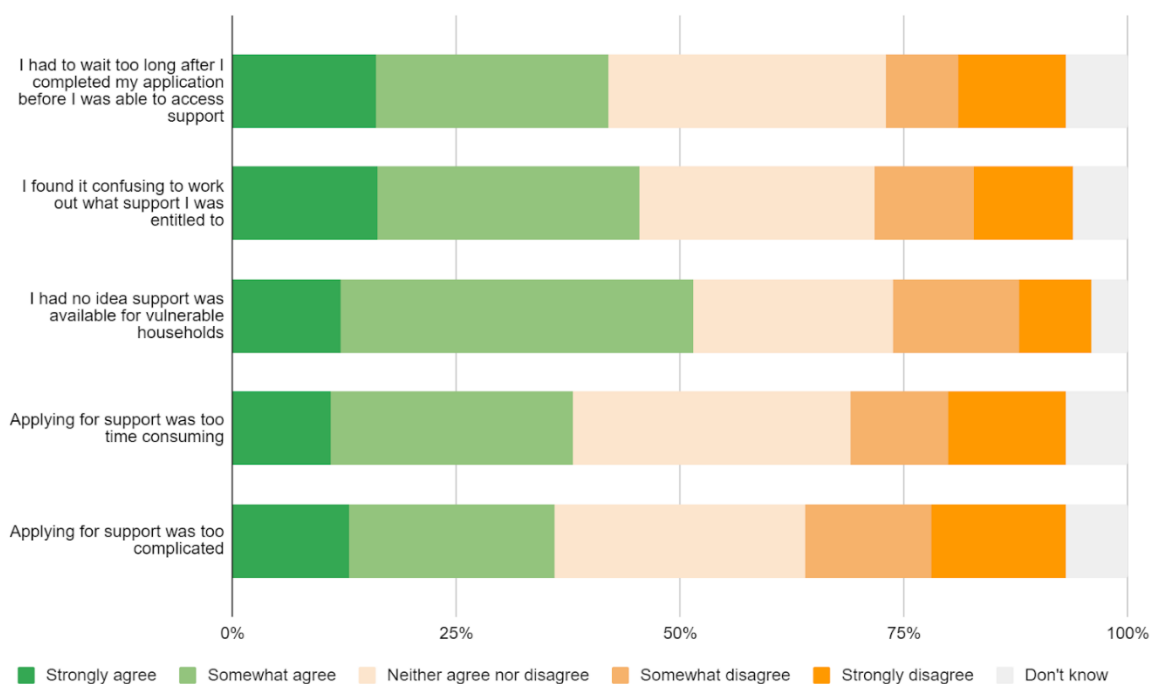
Those who receive financial support for their energy bills were most likely to say that they first approached the UK government for support (**26%**), followed by their energy supplier (**17%**), and their local or devolved government (**13%**). **5%** first approached Citizens Advice - rising to **8%** of people in lower social grades (DE). Only **57%** of people found the support they received from the first place they went helpful.

Again, there is a clear social grade trend here, with higher social grades more likely to have found the support helpful than those in lower social grades.

This suggests that there may be problems with accessing support for lower social grades - and for everyone who receives support for their energy bills more broadly. We found that;

- **51%** agreed that they “**had no idea** support was available for vulnerable households”
- **46%** agreed that they “found it confusing to work out what support I was entitled to”
- **42%** agreed that they “had to wait too long after I completed my application before I was able to access support”
- **38%** agreed that “Applying for support was too time consuming”
- **36%** agreed that “Applying for support was too complicated”

More people agreed than disagreed with each one of these statements by at least 7 percentage points.



Survey question: You said you receive support on your energy bills. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? (Receive support on energy bills)

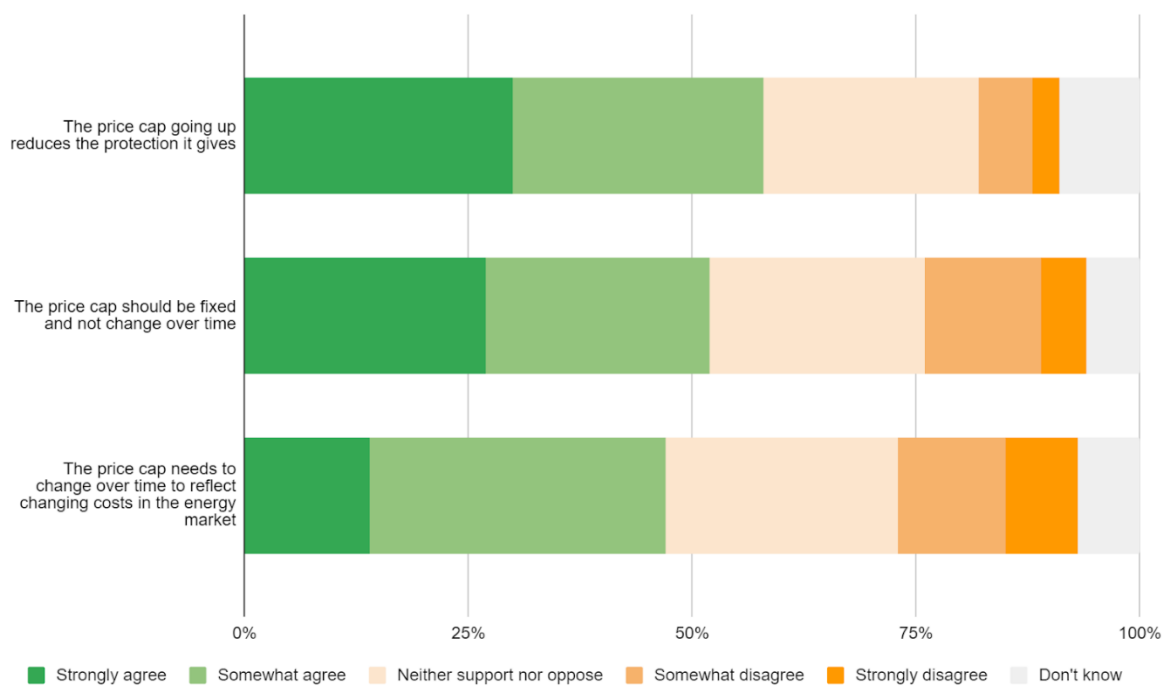
And the support that people do receive is, for many, insufficient. **35%** say that they receive less support than they need - compared to **25%** who say that they receive more support than they need.

The Energy Price Cap

The energy price cap is overwhelmingly popular. **66%** of people support the energy price cap - and it is more popular than unpopular across all demographic groups, even rising to **70%** support among 2019 Conservative Party voters.

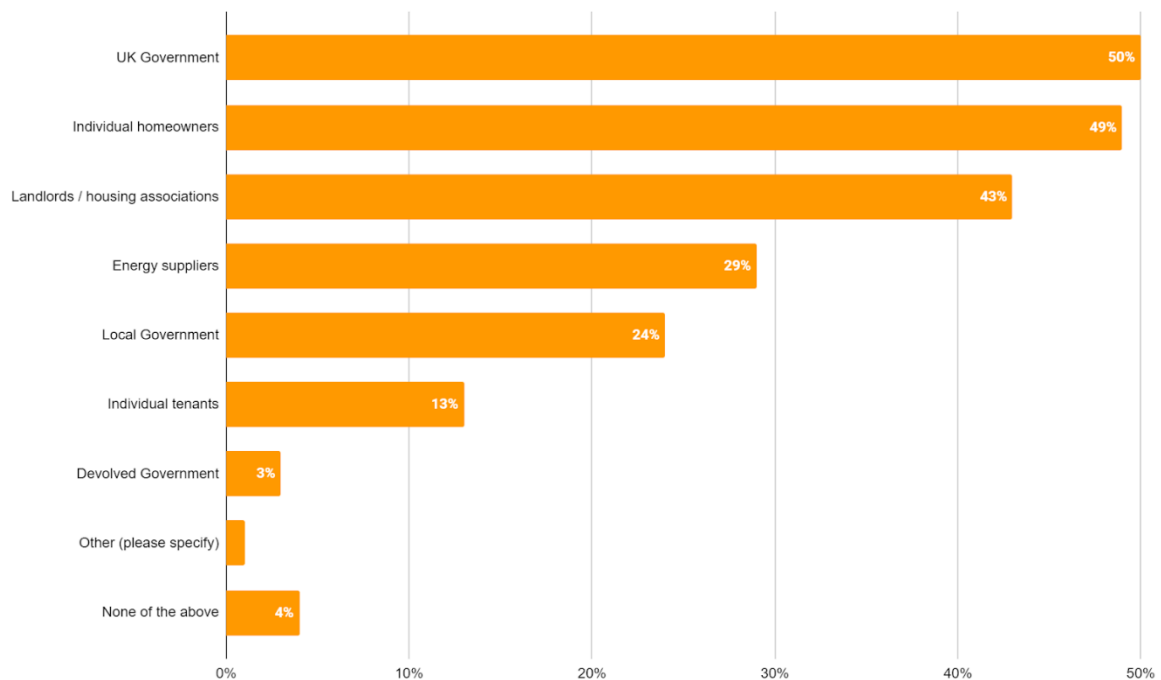
Similarly, we find significant agreement with the idea that the price cap going up reduces the protection it provides (**58%**). A majority agree with the idea that the price cap should be fixed and not change over time (**52%**).

Support for a 'permanent' price cap is high among younger people (**54%** versus **44%**), lower social grades (**57%** versus **45%**), in the North of England (**55%**), and among Labour voters (**58%**).



Survey question: The energy price cap has been raised in recent months and is likely to go up again later this year. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

Insulation and Energy Efficiency

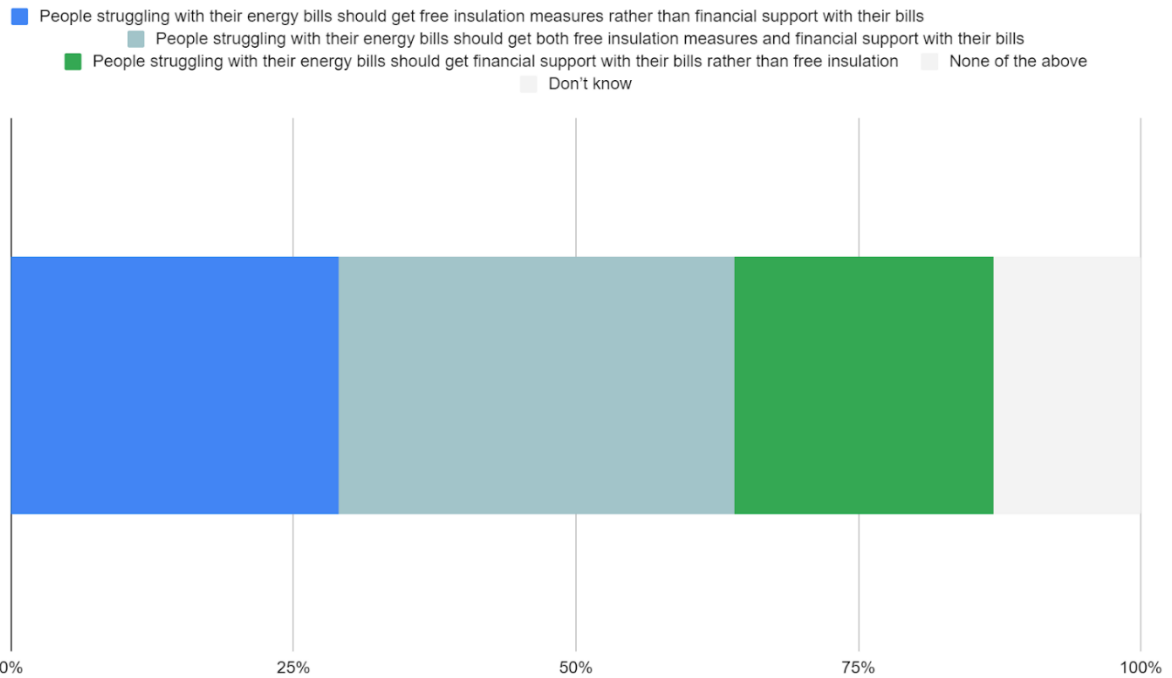


Survey question: Some households face high energy bills because their home is poorly insulated. Who do you think should be primarily responsible for improving the energy efficiency of such homes? Please select up to three.

The public overwhelmingly holds the UK Government responsible for improving the energy efficiency of poorly insulated houses (**50%**), closely followed by individual homeowners (**49%**) and landlords and housing associations (**43%**). Private renters are significantly more likely to hold the UK government (**55%**) and their landlords (**50%**) responsible for improving the insulation of homes with high energy bills.

Thinking about how support should be delivered to households struggling with their energy bills, the most popular option was to provide financial support with their bills *and* provide free insulation measures to ensure the longer-term energy efficiency of their homes (**35%**). Simply providing insulation was marginally more popular than simply providing financial support (**29%** and **23%**).

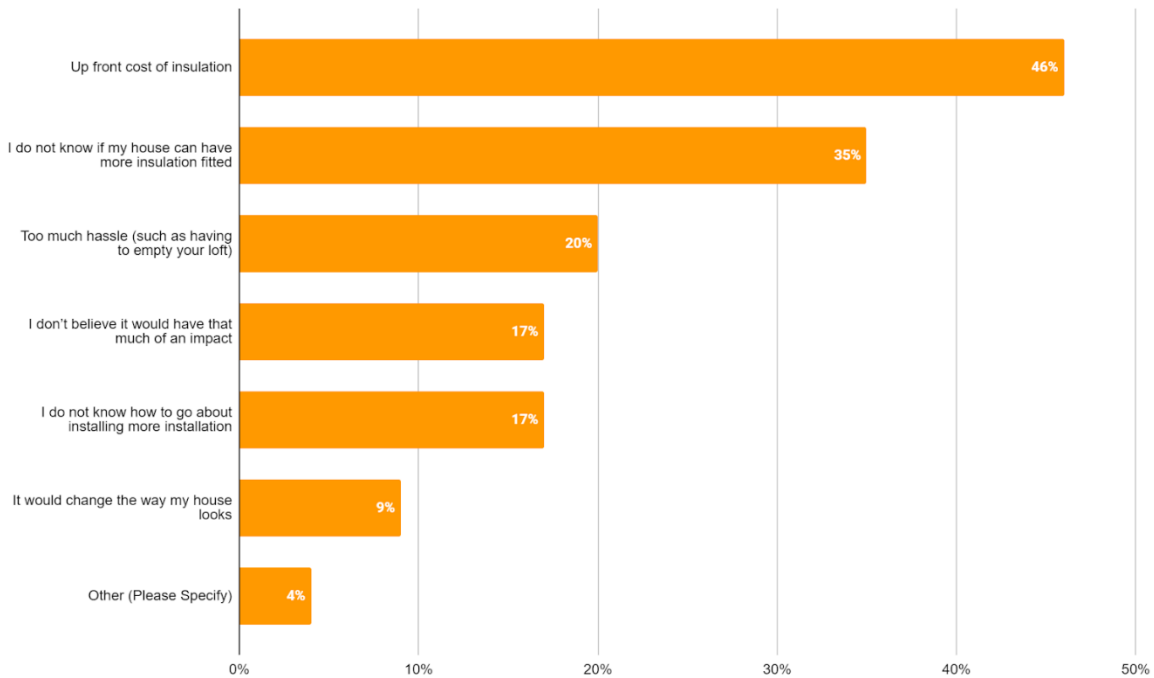
Among those who receive financial support with their energy bills already, people are more likely to say struggling households should get free insulation measures rather than financial support (**36%**), followed by free insulation *and* financial support (**30%**), and lastly simply benefiting from financial support (**29%**).



Survey question: Some people argue that the best way to help people who are struggling with their energy bills is to install more insulation measures in those people’s homes. Others argue the best way to help people is to give them money to help them pay their bills. Which of the following is closest to your view?

High support for insulation measures for others translates into high support for insulation measures at home. **75%** of homeowners say they would definitely or probably have extra insulation fitted to their home if the government offered to fit it.

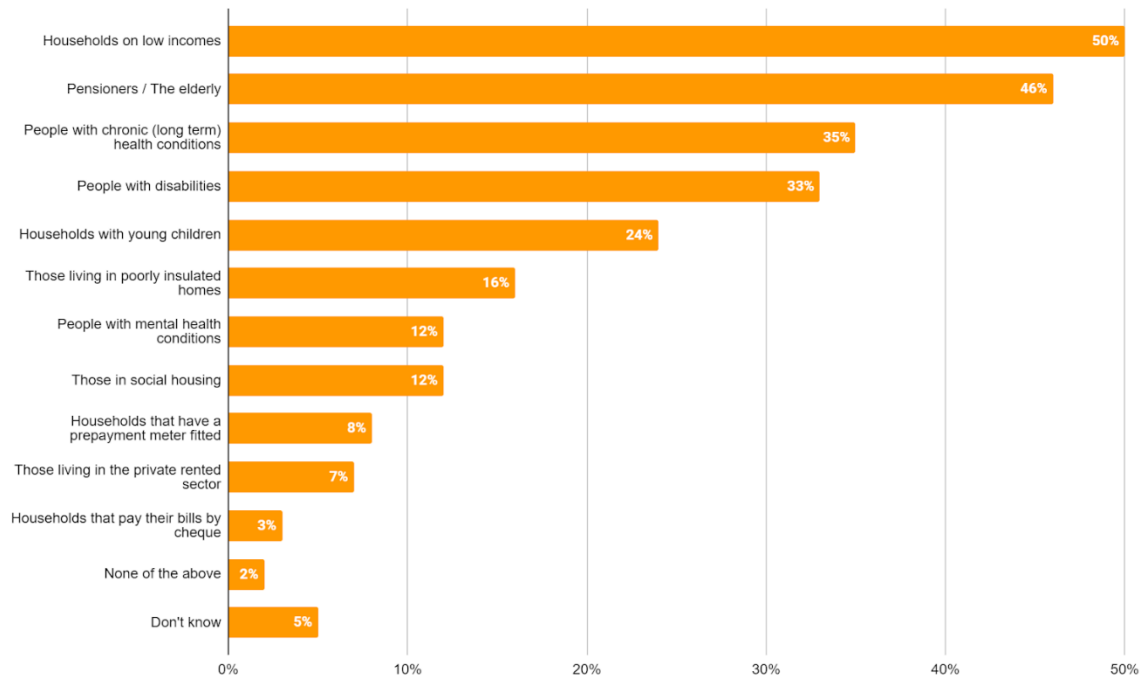
The main barriers to installing insulation are the upfront cost (**46%**), followed by a lack of clarity over whether insulation can be fitted (**35%**), and the hassle of having building work done (**20%**).



Survey question: Is it said that improved insulation can reduce your energy bills for many years ahead. Which of the following might put you off installing improved insulation? Please select all that apply. (Homeowners)

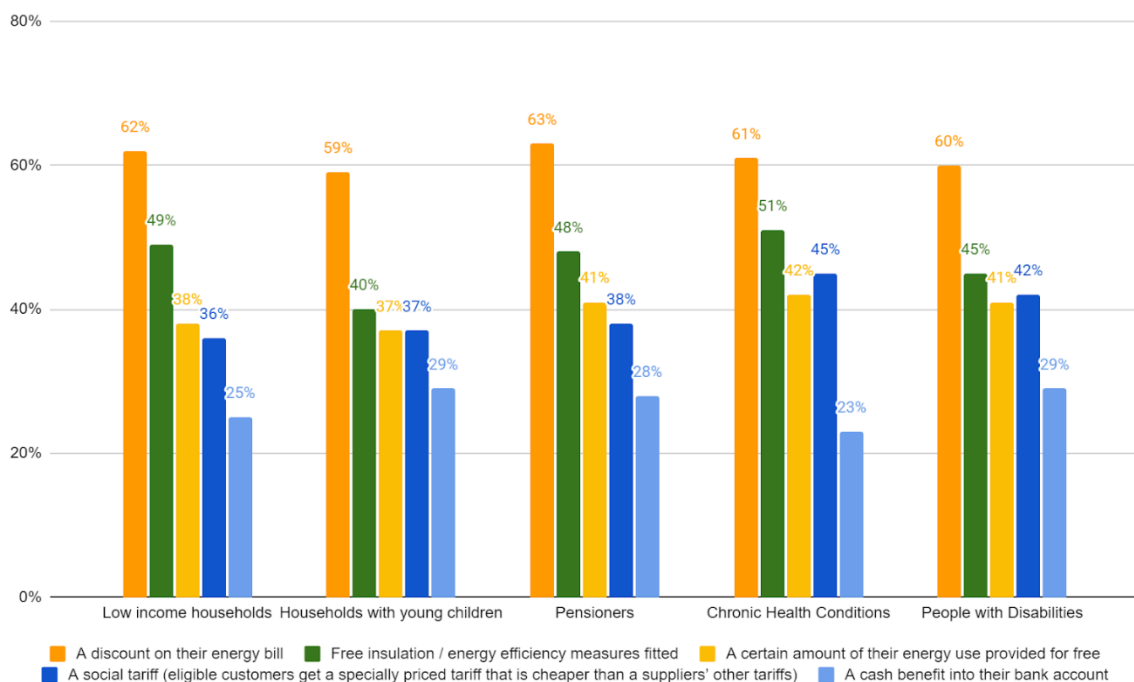
Government Support

- **62%** think that financial support should be made available to help with energy bills, in addition to other forms of support, versus just **21%** who oppose. There was also high support for schemes to help pay water bills (**59%** versus **24%**) and household food bills (**58%** versus **26%**).
- People want government support targeted towards households on low incomes (**50%**), pensioners (**46%**), people with chronic health conditions (**35%**) and people with disabilities (**33%**). Unsurprisingly, different groups are keen to receive support themselves - those living in the private rental sector are twice as likely as the country as a whole to say they should benefit from financial support, and older people are twice as likely to argue they should benefit from support than younger people (**63%** versus **30%**).



Survey question: If the government put in place a form of financial support specifically to help with energy bills targeted to those most in need, who should it target? Please select up to three groups.

When we asked people how support should be delivered for these different groups, we found that people were most supportive of a direct discount being applied to peoples energy bills, generally followed by support for directly fitting energy saving measures, such as free insulation. The concept of a “social tariff” was more popular for people with chronic health conditions and people with disabilities than for the other groups we tested.



Survey question: You said that you thought [X] should receive financial support. How do you think this support should be provided? Please select all that apply.

To learn more about this project or participate in our consultation, contact us at energy.bills@smf.co.uk.