



# FUEL CRISIS REPORT 2023



# FOREWORD

**Welcome to our Fuel Crisis Report 2023. This is the third consecutive year we have published the report, the findings of which are based on a survey of people helped by Fuel Bank Foundation in the past 12 months.**

The results paint a stark picture of the harsh reality of life for the millions of people who are in fuel poverty. This is perhaps unsurprising given the ongoing challenges faced by the UK such as the cost-of-living crisis and increased energy prices.

For our client group, this means not having the funds to top up their energy meter or oil tank, and therefore they face living today or tomorrow without heat, light or hot water. **We call this fuel crisis.**

In the last year, we have seen energy bills rise to record levels, with the average bill now costing £2500 and forecast to reach £3000 in April.<sup>1</sup> Worse still, prepayment customers saw the average cost of topping up their meters increase to a staggering £282 in January 2023 compared to £183 in January 2022. And people living off the gas grid, who heat their homes with oil, had to endure a price hike of up to 133%<sup>2</sup> compared to what they paid in 2021.

These price hikes coupled with inflationary pressures on household budgets, have seen people on lower incomes reaching financial breaking point and resorting to extreme measures just to survive. Of the people we surveyed, almost all (95%) said they had to choose between heating or eating, while 78% of respondents rationed heating and hot water at least once a week. Not using or reducing the use of electrical appliances, skipping meals, buying less food, and having cold meals instead of hot were also commonplace.

However, for those at the extreme end of the poverty scale, not even these measures can prevent the money on the meter running out and the lights and heating being switched off.

It is at this point that emergency intervention is required to get the power back on as quickly as possible. This is especially the case for people who have a critical need for energy in their home, such as powering medical equipment. Of those we surveyed, 41% of clients we had helped fall into this category.

In the past 12 months, we have helped more than 225,000 people through the provision of fuel vouchers and practical advice, and in doing so prevented a family, a single parent, or an elderly couple from having to live in a cold, dark home. This year, with fuel bills forecast to remain above historic averages and the cost of living continuing to put pressure on personal finances, we expect demand for support to rise further still.

These are difficult and desperate times for a lot of people, as the findings of our research demonstrate. I hope you find the report insightful and useful.

Whether you are a partner, a donor or sponsor, or indeed one of the thousands of people who help connect people who need help into Fuel Bank, thank you. We couldn't do it without you.

*Matthew Cole*

Matthew Cole, Head of Fuel Bank Foundation



# ABOUT US



Fuel Bank Foundation is the only national charity to provide emergency help to people living without heat, light and power in their homes because they can't afford to top up their prepayment gas and/or electricity meter. This is referred to as being in 'fuel crisis'.

**To date, more than 750,000 people have been helped by Fuel Bank Foundation across the United Kingdom.**

Fuel Bank was started in 2015 by energy company npower, after it recognised there was a need to provide support to households in fuel crisis. Two years later, Fuel Bank Foundation was registered as an independent charity. And in doing so, the move to charity status has enabled us to work with a wider range of energy providers allowing us to reach more people.

We are a small charity with big intentions. Our vision is a United Kingdom in which everyone has access to energy for the basics: to heat homes, keep the lights on and cook meals. Where we all have access to the support we need when we need it, enabling us to get on with our lives, work and education. Our background enables us to blend the best of charity and commercial best practice to ensure that our activity is

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**Help is provided in the form of a fuel voucher, which is used to top up the prepayment meter, alongside simple, easy to access, actionable advice.**

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anchored in our cause, and delivered with great pace, and efficiency.

We couldn't do what we do without our network of more than 490 partners, including food banks, charities, advice agencies, local authorities, and community groups. Often the first place people who are struggling turn to for help, we rely on our partners to identify those who desperately need support from Fuel Bank Foundation.

Whilst the fuel voucher addresses the immediate need of keeping the lights and heating on, and providing power for cooking, the practical advice helps prevent self-disconnection in the future and reduces the risk of dependency on fuel vouchers.

In addition to providing emergency help to households with prepayment meters, in 2021 Fuel Bank Foundation launched its Heat Fund, for homes not connected to the gas grid.

Heat Fund started as a pilot scheme in Scotland, in partnership with the Scottish Government, and has since been rolled out across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support the 2 million<sup>3</sup> homes that rely on solid fuels for their heating.

Households imminently at risk of running out of fuel can apply for an emergency delivery through the Heat Fund.

# PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

Understanding the people who need our help is key. This allows us to better target the services we provide and enables us to champion what is needed on their behalf.



## 1 People who pay in advance for their energy with a prepayment meter.

There are now around 4.5 million homes with a prepayment meter in the UK. This is increasing by around 10,000 a month as the cost-of-living crisis deepens and suppliers install prepayment meters to mitigate any debt risk. This means that they need to frequently 'top up' their electricity and gas meters at their local shop or Post Office or if they have a smart meter, via an app. If people can't afford to top up, they will self-disconnect and have no heating, hot water or means to cook hot meals.

Despite the introduction of the Government's Energy Price Cap Guarantee, which replaced the Ofgem price cap, typical energy bills are still almost double what they were last winter and are due to increase further in April. People with prepayment meters are more at risk in the winter months because, unlike direct debit customers, they cannot spread the cost across the whole year.

Our clients are more likely than average to be one of the 1.7 million<sup>4</sup> people who do not have a bank account. Having no or limited access to additional money reduces the chance of being able to weather any increase in energy costs and usage during the colder months.

## 2 Households that aren't connected to the mains gas network and have to bulk buy fuel to heat their homes.

2 million households across the UK are not connected to the gas network and rely on an unregulated fuel – such as heating oil, LPG, biomass, coal or wood – to keep warm. They will need to prepay for it before it is delivered, and this will cost at least several hundred pounds. At the end of 2022, the average charge for a delivery of oil was £939, a year-on-year increase of 63%. With global oil prices continuing to remain above the 10 year average, the impact of this is set to be with us for quite some time yet.<sup>5</sup>

## 3 People with multiple issues that require resolution.

98% of people we support are referred to us by a partner who is already attempting to address other material issues. Such as:

**INCOME MAXIMISATION**

**DEBT PROBLEMS**

**FOOD POVERTY**

**ENERGY EFFICIENCY**



# SUSAN'S STORY

**Let us introduce you to Susan. She has bravely opened up to us about her experience with the cost-of-living crisis and how Fuel Bank Foundation has helped her.**



Susan, 53, lives in a rented housing association flat in London. She has severe visual and cognitive learning impairment, dyslexia, and PTSD. She lives alone with no support from family or friends, which makes life very challenging.

"It's a struggle and immensely challenging, especially with no practical support around me," said Susan. "I rely on organisations like my local authority, Age UK, food banks and Fuel Bank Foundation to support me, and my only income is from state benefits."

**"I live in a flat in an old, Edwardian house, so it takes a while to warm up. I can't afford to heat the whole flat so I live in one room. I sleep in there as well because all the equipment I need is in there. I wear layers of clothing to stay warm. Sometimes I can wear three layers of clothing, two pairs of socks and a hat it's that cold."**

When asked what she would do if she had extra money, Susan said: "I would use it top up my prepayment meter, to heat my flat and put the lights on. I'm severely visually impaired and because I can't afford to put the lights on I'm putting myself in danger. I have fallen over and fractured my ankle in the past. It's so upsetting, I'm distraught and I've been in tears that I'm living like this at my age."

Susan is one of the thousands of vulnerable people who have a critical need for energy due to a disability or medical condition.

To try and save money, Susan has to watch what she spends her money on. To help with food, she visits her local food bank, which has been really helpful and referred Susan to the Fuel Bank Foundation for support and advice with her energy bills.

**"I go to my local food bank when things are bad, so I can at least eat one hot meal a day," she said. "I was in mental distress but they were very helpful. It was good to be able to get a warm drink and talk to people who wanted to help me."**

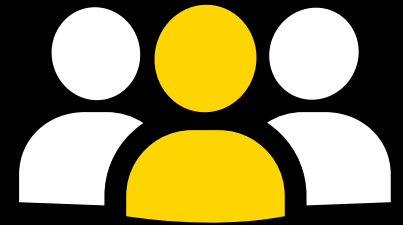
"The Fuel Bank Foundation has also been amazing, giving me advice on what financial support I was eligible for. As someone who is disabled and extremely vulnerable, they were able to help and point me in the right direction. They listened to me when I broke down in tears and have helped me live sufficiently independently despite my disabilities."

**"We need to bring more attention to the severity of the cost-of-living crisis. I know other people with disabilities like myself who can't afford to put the heating on and eat, so they have to choose."**

"More needs to be done to address this and how it's impacting people with disabilities. We are a silent minority. I really hope that by speaking out we can change things and improve lives."

# PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

The situation for many, at the time of first coming into contact with Fuel Bank was desperate. They were either running on emergency credit or had completely run out of money to top up the meter and felt like they had nowhere to turn.



“

We had no gas for four days. We didn't know who to approach for anything like that. We were literally freezing, my partner's chest was getting worse, and I was panicking and trying to borrow money and just couldn't get it from anywhere.

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“

My meter was constantly just on emergency credit and sometimes it would be switched off and sometimes I would have to just leave it off till the morning until I could go out and get it sorted.

”

“

I think we were down to our last £5 on our meters and there was four or five days left before any money was going to come in, so it was going to be the case that we were going to end up having no gas or electricity for at least a couple of days.

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# SNAPSHOT

## At the time of receiving the fuel voucher:

- 99%** of people we have supported were taking some sort of action to save money
- 95%** of people we have supported were having to choose between heating and eating
- 61%** of people we have supported were on emergency credit or had already been disconnected
- 65%** of people we have supported were keeping the heating off
- 55%** of people we have supported were skipping meals

## In the 12 months before receiving a fuel voucher:

- 89%** of people we have supported were more worried about their finances compared to last year
- 44%** of people we have supported were having to choose between heating and eating
- 51%** of people we have supported were sacrificing hot food more than once a week
- 96%** of people we have supported were struggling to pay other household bills, compared to 74% in 2022

## The Fuel Bank Foundation is having a significant and positive impact on the people it supports. After receiving a voucher:

**91%** of people feel that they were able to cope better financially

**59%** of people reported an improvement in their physical wellbeing

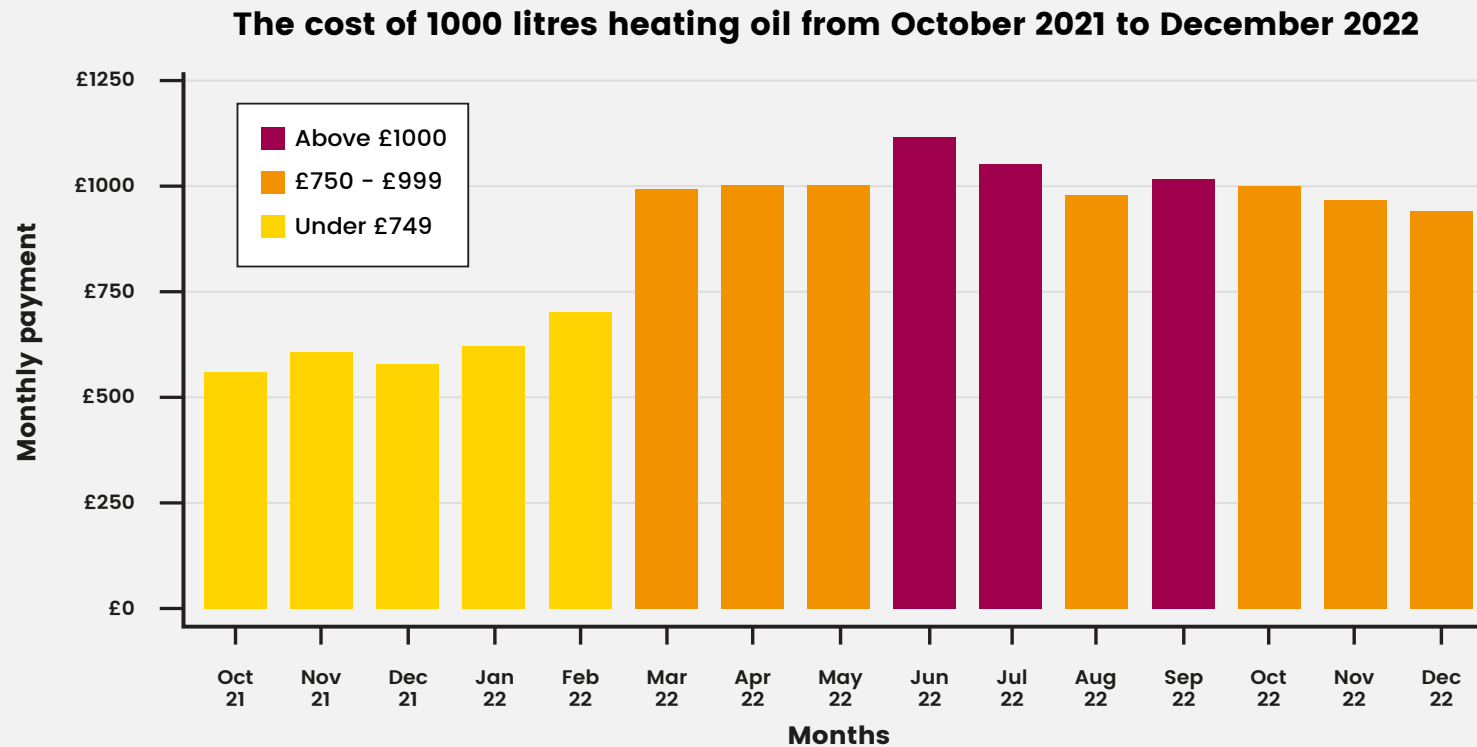
**61%** of people reported an improvement in mental wellbeing

**HOWEVER, 75% OF PEOPLE HELPED STILL FACE SELF-DISCONNECTION AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH.**

# INCREASING OIL PRICES



This chart shows the reality of the increasing costs to heat a home using oil.  
We've modelled the wholesale price of oil based on real tanks we have filled over the last 2 years.





## THE AVERAGE PRICE OF OIL FOR HOME HEATING IN THE UK HAS DOUBLED IN 12 MONTHS.

With a typical home having, on average three oil deliveries every two years, the Government's one-off Alternative Fuel Payment of £200 still leaves people living without heat and hot water because they can't afford to buy fuel.

Over half of the people supported by Heat Fund in the last 12 months, had a disability or life-impacting condition with a critical need for energy with many also having above average household electricity consumption for this reason, so the need to keep homes warm is even more important.

Prior to Heat Fund, national support for the millions of homes that rely on non-gas fuels for heating was very limited. **Having to prepay in advance for a bulk delivery of fuel is very expensive.** As a result, people already struggling financially are more likely to ration or put off refilling their gas or oil tank, leaving them without heat, hot water and cooking capability. The Heat Fund addresses this issue and provides a lifeline for many who are struggling, ensuring that people are not left without energy for basics like heating and hot water.

**Further Government support is needed for these people to avoid detrimental rationing.**

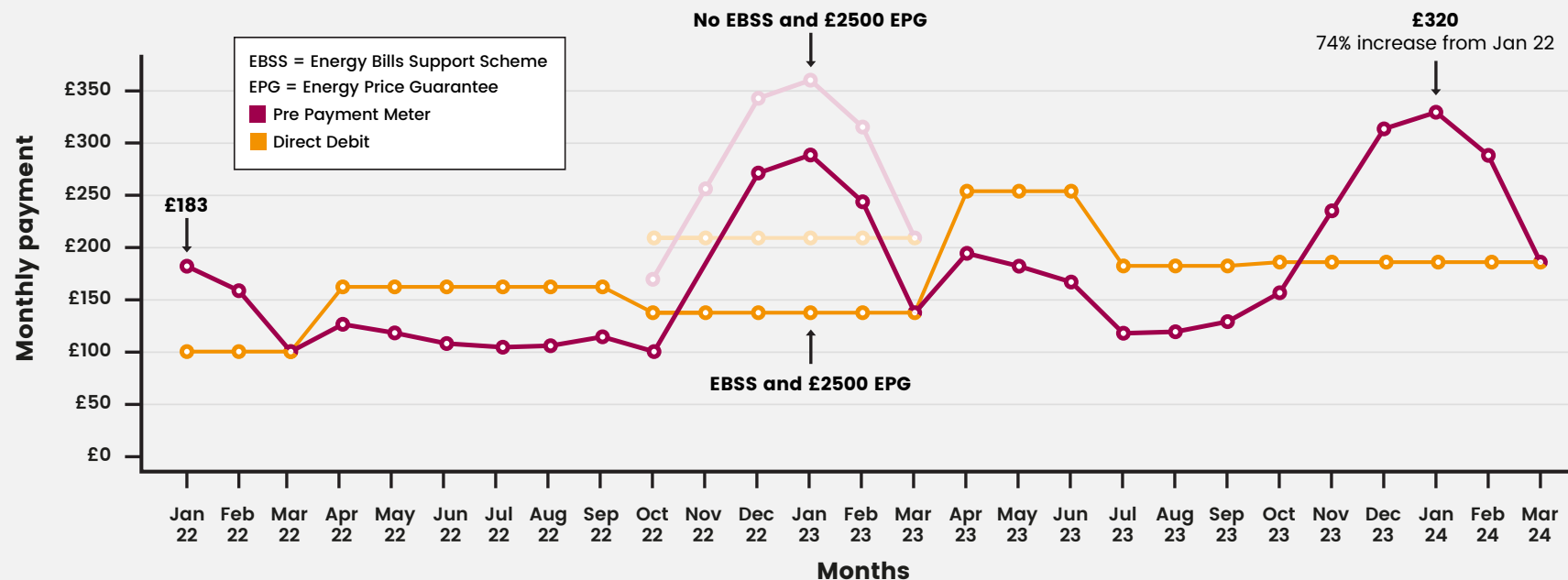


**The Oil Tracker**  
by Fuel Bank Foundation

# PREPAYMENT METER TOP-UP PRICE FLUCTUATIONS

Our forecast shows that over the course of 2 years, the price of keeping warm in winter will increase by a staggering 74% for a prepayment customer, rising from £183 a month in January 2022 to a predicted cost of £320 a month in January 2024.

Forecasted **Direct Debit (DD)** price cap increase vs **Pre Payment Meter (PPM)** price cap increase



**People with prepayment meters are more at risk in the winter months because, unlike direct debit customers, they cannot spread the cost across the whole year meaning they pay more in the winter to keep warm.**

This is exacerbated by the typical, fixed nature of household incomes and the financial vulnerability of those who prepay. This substantial seasonal fluctuation of payments needs to be addressed to mitigate the risk of people having to live without heat and power in the winter months. Our research has shown that 65% of people who turned to Fuel Bank for support, had already switched the heating off to save money and were living in the cold.

**This can't continue.**

The average prepayment meter top up in January 2023 was £282, which included the Government support measures (Energy Price Guarantee and Energy Bill Support Scheme), however we have forecast that it will increase to £320 in January 2024 and even though prices are falling, they are still significantly higher than they were 12 months ago.

**Despite the introduction of the Government's Energy Price Guarantee, typical energy bills are still almost double what they were last winter. People have had to suffer the cost of the October price increase in addition to the colder weather over the winter months, so the impact has been twofold and very hard to manage.**

The Energy Bill Support Scheme monthly payment has been a lifeline for many but 29%<sup>6</sup> of all vouchers available for traditional prepayment customers still haven't been redeemed, leaving millions of pounds worth of unclaimed funding that could be keeping people warm.



“We use the food banks once a week, we still need that, because obviously teabags, coffee, pasta – everything’s doubled. And whatever we can help ourselves with, we do that, so that we don’t have to spend so much on the weekly or fortnightly shop.”

“I wasn’t eating myself at one stage – as long as my partner got to eat with her health conditions, and my little girl got to eat, that’s all that mattered to me.”

“There’s been times when the council tax hasn’t been paid for a couple of months and it’s been sent forward to a debt recovery agency and we’ve had to make up a payment plan to make smaller payments, instead of paying the full amount. But it costs more in the long run due to their fees.”

“If I wasn’t paying extra for electricity and gas, I would have a bit more for food. But now it’s eating into my food allowance because it has gone up. I normally go 2 or 3 days without eating and then I have a main meal later in the afternoon or night depending on how hungry I am.”

# WIDER POVERTY PROBLEM

**While rising bills will affect most households across the country, they are more likely to disproportionately impact those in the most deprived areas.**

**96%** of people we supported are struggling with other essential household bills with many already receiving additional financial support for bills and expenses.

## These include:

- Food banks
- Discounts on water bills
- Council Tax reduction
- Payment plans for media providers
- Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS)
- Warm Homes Discount

The EBSS, however, doesn’t seem to be easy to access if you have a non-Smart prepayment meter – people talked of having to call their energy suppliers several times to chase the monthly £66 payment. Only 71% of available payments for those on prepayment meters have been redeemed so far, meaning many could be missing out on the discount.

We have urged suppliers to make sure they are doing all they can to ensure their customers with prepayment meters know what to look out for and exactly how to redeem their EBSS voucher.

The majority of people supported are in receipt of benefits, mostly universal credit or state pension. Other benefits mentioned were child benefit, personal independence payment, employment and support allowance, and carer’s allowance. A significant minority (23%) of those supported are in employment.

Generally, those of working age who aren’t working had to give up work due to their own disability or that of a family member who they now care for. Some who’ve reached retirement age ‘can’t survive’ off the state pension alone and are looking for work. Having no savings and being in debt is common; the types of debt vary between things like rent arrears, credit cards, prepayment meters, and other utility bills.

**What is common for everyone is a feeling of relentless financial struggle and uncertainty.**





“

I tell the kids  
I don't know what  
the future holds.

”

# 81%

**OF THE 18-35 YEAR  
OLDS WHO WERE ON  
EMERGENCY CREDIT, OR  
ABOUT TO RUN OUT OF  
MONEY TO TOP UP, HAVE  
CHILDREN AT HOME.**





# OUR IMPACT

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting us all. More people are having to make the choice between “heating and eating” and it’s having a greater impact on our physical and mental wellbeing than ever before.

## MENTAL WELLBEING

**Increases in debt and living costs prey heavily on people’s minds.**

Last year, 88% of people supported reported an improvement in mental wellbeing. However, the severity and uncertainty of the cost-of-living crisis over the last 12 months has exacerbated the situation and has had an increased impact on mental wellbeing.

This year, 61% of people supported reported an improvement in mental wellbeing. This is reflective of the wider cost-of-living crisis and the impact it’s having on people’s lives. We have seen people using different coping mechanisms, which can impact their mental health, for example turning to gambling and having to seek medical support for anxiety and depression.

**“It makes me feel powerless, like I am a useless mother because I can’t give my kids basic things, you are so powerless.”**

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**“Mentally wasn’t too great - I had to get some counselling, and my GP identified that I needed some medication, so I wasn’t coping too great.”**

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**“I suffer arthritis, so I need heat to reduce my pain. It helped with my mental health, and helped with my children, so they were warm. It was a godsend when I found out about it, I needed it then most”**





# OUR IMPACT

## PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Our support enables people to meet basic daily needs like heating their homes, providing hot water for showers and baths and cooking warm meals. For some people, running out of money on the meter could result in serious health complications.

Our research found that 41% of the people we supported had a critical need for energy, whether for managing common conditions such as asthma, COPD and other respiratory problems that get worse in the cold, or for powering electrical medical equipment.

It also shows that getting access to help and advice can have a positive impact on people's physical wellbeing, easing physical distress and allowing them to maintain daily routines. This year, 59% of people supported reported an improvement in their physical wellbeing. This has decreased from last year where 87% of people reported an improvement in their physical wellbeing. Again, we found this is reflective of the severity of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact it is having on people's lives.

**"I have a CPAP machine for breathing at night because I've got sleep apnoea. I've also got arthritis in my knees and a bad back, which gets worse in the cold."**

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**"My partner has primary progressive MS. He relies on his electric wheelchair, which regularly needs charging."**

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**"Lack of heating cripples me because I suffer with fibromyalgia with the arthritis I have got, absolutely cripples me in the winter."**



“

I think I'll just have to go back to work and suffer with my back. So, I'm not going to enjoy my retirement. The cost of living means we cannot survive like this and it's pointless struggling and struggling all the time, relying on people. I don't know how long my back would last, but I'd take anything.

”





# THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS

We have a network of partners across the UK, including food banks, debt agencies, advice agencies, and national high street charities, all places where people turn when they're in crisis. This allows us to deliver targeted support and services quickly, to those who are most in need of our help.

**We would like to thank our community of trusted partners who help us to deliver our service efficiently and with compassion and empathy.**

We would also like to thank the public for their kindness and support. We have seen a significant increase in public donations over the course of 2022. Before the energy crisis, we received only a handful of public donations every year. However, the cost-of-living crisis and rising energy bills have put fuel poverty in the spotlight. This created greater awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by people on lower incomes, which in turn has generated thousands of donations.

We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of the public and are extremely grateful to those who have felt compelled to help those less fortunate than themselves. Our commitment is that all money donated by the public goes directly to buy fuel for those who need it. Not a penny is spent on operational costs.

And finally, we couldn't do what we do without the financial backing of our other supporters. Many organisations help fund Fuel Banks in their local communities. We have been able to expand our network of partners by 146 over 2022 allowing us to help more people living in fuel crisis.

This wouldn't have been possible without the generous support of:

- Affordable Warmth Solutions' Warm Homes Fund
- BP
- Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN and Wales & West Utilities together with Northern Powergrid, SP Energy Networks & Scottish and Southern Energy Networks
- Celtic FC Foundation
- Energy Savings Trust's Energy Redress Support Fund
- National Grid
- The Scottish Government
- The Watches of Switzerland Group Foundation
- The Welsh Government



# CONCLUSION

**It is clear from our research that people are still desperately struggling to meet the extra financial demands caused by rising energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis.**

Fuel Bank Foundation has seen a record level of demand for its services as more and more people can't afford to top up their prepayment meter. Without our help and support they face living without heat, light and power in their home.

For many of the people who come to us for help, it's their first experience of being in fuel crisis. For others it's a regular occurrence. But for most, they have found themselves in financial difficulty through no fault of their own, be it because of losing their job during the Covid-19 pandemic or not being able to work for health reasons. They don't want handouts, just the opportunity to improve their lives and not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from or having enough money to have a hot bath or shower – things most of us take for granted.

Whilst recent global events have clearly exacerbated the problem, fuel poverty isn't a new phenomenon. Fuel Bank was set up in 2015 in response to the need to provide financial support to people with prepayment meters. Nearly ten years on and little has changed. If anything, the situation is worse.

As evidenced in this report, our help does make a difference to people's lives – financially, mentally and physically – but it's a sticking plaster (albeit an essential one) rather than a cure. Collective concerted action needs to be taken by Government, energy suppliers and industry bodies to provide solutions to what is fast becoming, if not already, a national emergency.

**To this end, we are putting forward the following recommendations.**



**1**

## **GOVERNMENT-FUNDED ENERGY EFFICIENT HOMES PROGRAMME**

Too many people in the UK are living in homes that are difficult and / or expensive to heat. The UK and devolved Governments must urgently fund an ambitious, comprehensive energy efficiency programme to improve the housing stock.

They should publish a plan with milestones to ensure that progress can be monitored, and those in the deepest fuel poverty should be prioritised for improvements. But we recognise that this is a long-term solution requiring system change and other measures will be needed in the interim to act as a bridge.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of our research and our own experiences over the past 12 months, we are making the following recommendations to the Government, Ofgem and suppliers.

2

## **INCREASE WARM HOME DISCOUNT SCHEME OR INTRODUCE SOCIAL TARIFF**

Given the scale of the cost-of living crisis, the Government needs to consider either increasing the numbers of people who are eligible for the Warm Home Discount or introducing a Social Tariff targeted at low-income households who are struggling to pay their energy bills.

Despite the Government's previous interventions, this group still requires additional, ongoing financial support to pay for energy. A Task Force should be set up to include Government, suppliers, Ofgem and charities to co-design a solution and decide how it should be funded.

3

## **REINSTATE GOVERNMENT ENERGY SUPPORT FOR THE POOREST**

Whilst retail energy prices are set to come down later this year, they are still forecast to remain above historic levels for the foreseeable future.

As a result of the general cost-of-living crisis, and the fact that benefits were not uprated in line with inflation this year, our research has shown how much our clients are struggling. So, energy will remain unaffordable for them even as prices begin to reduce. The Government should undertake a review of what further financial support will again be needed for all low-income households ahead of next winter.

4

## **TARGETED FUEL CRISIS SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR ALL NATIONS OF THE UK**

Demand for our Fuel Crisis support has increased by more than 200% in the past twelve months which has put pressure on our ability to continue to fund our Fuel Bank centres and the services we provide through our local Partner network.

Both the Scottish and Welsh Governments recognise the value of using a hybrid of national and local fuel crisis provision to support those people who have fallen through every other safety net. So, they have supported us financially to help them deliver it. We would very much welcome conversations with the UK Government to demonstrate to them the benefits they would get from funding our work.

5

## **OFGEM'S REVIEW OF PREPAYMENT METER REGULATIONS**

We welcome Ofgem's review and trust that they will strengthen and enforce regulations where they find evidence of failures and non-compliance. All customers should be able to have an expectation that regulatory obligations are complied with consistently, both within and between suppliers.

We would like to see more ambition from suppliers in the way that they treat their prepayment customers. Crucially, given that our research shows that 41% of our clients have a critical need for energy, we think that all suppliers should contact their customers annually to check that people who are dependent on energy for their health don't have a prepayment meter if they don't want one.

6

## **SUPPLIERS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICE**

Our research has demonstrated that there are inconsistencies between suppliers in the level of service and quality of support provided to customers. We would urge suppliers to take ownership of this issue; sharing and celebrating examples of best practice and working together to develop creative solutions to help prevent self-disconnections.

We firmly believe that prepayment meters are not in themselves bad (many of our clients tell us that they like them because they give them control over their energy bills). But, given the severe consequences of not being able to afford to top up, suppliers must offer as much support as possible to their customers to prevent self-disconnections.

7

## **ENSURE PREPAYMENT CUSTOMERS RECEIVE EBSS VOUCHERS**

When people are entitled to support, they should receive it automatically, without having to do any work themselves. This principle should be absolutely core to any schemes to provide financial assistance. And, yet, some prepayment meter customers are reporting problems receiving or redeeming their Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS) vouchers, with hundreds of thousands going unclaimed.

Low-income households should not be receiving a second-class service relative to other customers. The Government must ensure that the value of all unredeemed prepayment EBSS vouchers is automatically credited to the customer's meter or energy account. Finally, if the scheme is reinstated next winter, these issues need to be ironed out so that it works better for customers who have analogue prepayment meters.

8

## **RESEARCH POSSIBLE LINKS BETWEEN FUEL POVERTY AND PROBLEM GAMBLING**

Through our work, we are hearing anecdotal evidence which suggests people in deprived areas are turning to gambling as a last resort to get money to pay for their energy and other household bills. There may even be a rural dimension to the issue, where people who feel socially isolated are regularly gambling because it makes them feel that they are part of a community.

To better understand the potential link between fuel poverty and problem gambling, research needs to be conducted by the Government and, if a link is proven, it should work with the gambling industry to address the issues.

9

## **ENSURE SMART METER CUSTOMERS ARE AWARE BEFORE BEING SWITCHED TO PREPAYMENT**

We know that people struggling with energy debts are usually juggling multiple other debts too. Suppliers must work harder to understand the harsh reality of some of their customers' lives and build this into the design of their communications so that they are accessible to all.

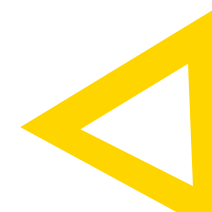
Some customers genuinely believe that they have been switched from credit to prepayment mode on their energy meter without warning, when it's more likely that they simply haven't opened letters about their debt or understood the communications from their supplier. Suppliers should actively review their communications to ensure people who are in debt and have a smart meter really understand they will have to prepay for energy before the change is made.

10

## **MORE PROTECTION FOR CONSUMERS WHO USE UN-REGULATED FUELS**

People who live off the gas grid are struggling to prepay for their fuel for heating as prices have increased and minimum amounts for delivery now run into several hundred pounds.

The Government should ask oil and LPG distributors to offer payment plans to make deliveries more affordable. It should also ensure households that are dependent on unregulated fuels for their heating receive a similar level of consumer protection to those that are supplied via the gas grid. This will become even more important as we move to a future of low-carbon off-gas grid homes.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to know more about Fuel Bank Foundation and its work and how you could support us:

Visit: **[fuelbankfoundation.org](https://fuelbankfoundation.org)**

Email: **[admin@fuelbankfoundation.org](mailto:admin@fuelbankfoundation.org)**



## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-bills-support/energy-bills-support-factsheet-8-september-2022>
- <sup>2</sup> Oil Tracker, 133% increase, June 21 £479.50, June 22 £1115
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vital-help-with-energy-bills-on-the-way-for-millions-more-homes-across-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://financialhealthexchange.org.uk/news/a-third-of-people-without-bank-accounts-in-the-uk-say-its-a-preference/>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-government-figures-shine-a-light-on-which-suppliers-are-supporting-households-this-winter#off-grid-households-to-receive-alternative-fuel-payments-from-february>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/29-of-traditional-prepayment-meter-customers-still-havent-received-their-energy-support-payments-al6h85Q6eBUv>

Survey data based on a representative poll of 1,374 adults (18+) prepayment meter customers in the UK, who had received one or more Fuel Bank vouchers in the past year. Research was conducted by Bluegrass Research Ltd, conducted between 25th November and 6 December 2022.

A total of 1374 responses is a robust and reliable sample. It represents 1.83% of the 75,257 people to whom vouchers were issued from 1st October 2021 to 21st October 2022. This delivers a maximum margin of error of  $\pm 2.62\%$ , and as such we are using it in this report to draw wider conclusions

Fuel Bank Foundation is a registered charity in England & Wales (1175049) and Scotland (SCO48330)

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