

BESA calls for 'massive retrofit push' to address energy crisis

3 years ago



The Building Engineering Services Association (BESA) says the dramatic surge in energy prices reinforces the need for a national programme of building retrofits.

The Association applauded the government's attempts to soften the blow to household finances following Ofgem's decision to lift the energy price cap by 54% from April, but said longer term measures were needed to tackle the issue properly.

"Millions of people are now facing real hardship as a result of the soaring cost of gas and electricity, but we do not have a comprehensive plan for addressing a major contributory factor - the poor energy efficiency of our buildings," said BESA's head of technical Graeme Fox.

"The price of energy has never had a higher profile, but most of the talk about possible solutions either refers to short-term financial measures and adjustments to the tax regime or very expensive technical fixes like renewables and hydrogen. Yet, we can fix energy efficiency relatively quickly and cost-effectively through renovation and refurbishment," added Fox.

Ofgem has announced that the average energy bill for around 18 million households will rise by almost £700 from April. Chancellor Rishi Sunak has promised support via council tax rebates and a discount scheme that will need to be paid back over five years. However, energy market analysts have already predicted further price rises next year and beyond.

"The government is trying to help by redistributing taxpayers' money to delay the full impact, but unless we fundamentally tackle the energy performance of both residential and commercial buildings this will simply become a bigger and bigger problem in the years to come," said Fox.

“We are also in an artificial position because interest rates have been low for so long. The Bank of England has just nudged them up by another 0.25% and they are likely to rise again soon. This, along with higher inflation, will put further pressure on families and businesses who are currently relying on cheap credit to keep their heads above water.”

BESA also welcomed a new report from the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy’s (BEIS) Select Committee, which has urged the government to invest more heavily in the decarbonisation of heating. Many of the recommendations in the report would also have a positive impact on long-term energy consumption in buildings and help to lower bills, the Association said.

The committee is calling for a replacement for the ill-fated Green Homes Grant, which would be delivered by regional and local government to try and avoid the bureaucratic problems that undermined the last scheme. It said this should be accompanied by a national consumer awareness campaign that would also explain the importance of energy efficiency measures to make low carbon heating technologies, like heat pumps, achieve their full potential.

“Any new low carbon heating incentives would be launching into a much more receptive marketplace now because of the growing alarm over rising energy bills,” said Fox.

Funding could also be aimed at the lowest income homes and those that are most difficult to retrofit to directly support those most likely to suffer most from rising energy costs, the report added. The committee also advised the government to bring forward the Future Homes Standard by two years to 2023, which would help to speed up energy saving improvements.

BESA also urged the government to consult with the industries directly involved in the decarbonisation of heat, such as building services, to fully understand the implications of its policy proposals not least on the need for investment in training and skills.

“We must work together to develop a national low carbon heating training programme to ensure we have the skills to deliver solutions on a scale that can both help tackle climate change and give consumers protection from rising bills,” said Fox.

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