

# UK cities overpaying for energy

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Credit: University of Leeds

The UK's 50 largest cities could save £7 billion annually and create over 90,000 years' worth of extra employment by adopting simple measures to cut their energy use and counter climate change.

The most comprehensive survey yet of cities' energy-saving capabilities – revealed today at an event in Leeds – shows they are failing to capitalise on profitable opportunities which could slash costs for houses, schools, hospitals and businesses by billions of pounds, saving an average of £300 per year for every person in the 50 cities.

In London alone, cost-effective measures would see more than £2 billion wiped off a total yearly energy bill of more than £11 billion by 2026, and carbon emissions would fall by 23.5 per cent over and above current predictions as a result.

The pattern is repeated across the country, with the new research identifying a host of opportunities for investment which could play a huge part in stimulating the economy as well as safeguarding the public against [climate](#) change.

The study, carried out at the University of Leeds, assessed the total energy bills of the UK's 50 biggest cities – which currently amount to over £35 billion a year, and average £1,500 per person. It found that simple, profitable improvements to heating, lighting, insulation, appliances and vehicles would reap extraordinary results for their 23.5 million citizens.

The manufacturing, installation and maintenance involved in implementing these improvements would create the equivalent of 90,000 new man-years of employment in the 50 cities, while [carbon emissions](#) from these cities would be cut by almost a quarter more than currently expected.

The up-front cost of the changes would total less than one per cent of GDP annually for the next ten years. Measures such as more efficient lighting in homes or cooling in retail buildings would cover their costs in approximately a year and generate profits thereafter.

"There is so much more we could and should be doing to unlock these opportunities," said Professor Andy Gouldson, who led the study from the ESRC Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy at the University of Leeds.

"All cities are struggling to deliver things like low-carbon strategies in the face of spending cuts, but we've proved that garnering investment in practical energy-saving measures is a win-win for all involved," he added.

"Industry wins, local authorities win, householders win and the climate wins."

But Professor Gouldson argued that it won't happen without some facilitation from central government and a change in the way that local authorities try and do things.

"Central government would normally fall over themselves to deliver an economic stimulus package or an infrastructure investment on this scale, but they're not doing that here, perhaps because of austerity and a sense that [climate change](#) is economically too challenging," he said.

"And local government is facing some significant challenges when it tries to address these issues, given the scale of the cuts they've had to face."

However, Professor Gouldson argued that with some lateral thinking they could still do it. "The harsh reality is that we can't rely on local government to do this alone, but if the public, private and third sectors in a [city](#) come together, they can find new ways to get things done."

This is what's happening in Leeds, where a pioneering Climate Commission hopes to stimulate the city by encouraging investment in low-carbon, climate-resilient development.

Launched today by former Environment Secretary and current chair of the UK Committee on Climate Change Lord Deben, the Leeds Climate Commission harnesses the capacity of 24 key businesses and

organisations.

These range from Yorkshire Water and the NHS to house builders, transport providers and community groups.

Leeds City Council leader Councillor Judith Blake said: "In Leeds we are fully committed to creating a low-carbon, climate-resilient city, and the Climate Commission takes us another step closer to this.

"It will ensure that organisations across the city come together and really make a move to cut the city's energy bill and look at how we can pass these savings on to households."

Professor Gouldson added: "We are delighted that even in the current climate, Leeds City Council has backed this initiative and is playing a leading role in creating the environment for productive collaboration."

Leeds has a history of attracting investment (more than £10m in 2016/17) to improve the housing stock in the city and is progressing a citywide District Heating scheme. It has a successful solar scheme which saves 1,200 tonnes of CO2 per year as well as saving housing tenants £130,000 on their fuel bills. The council has also launched White Rose Energy, a not-for-profit energy company providing low-cost energy to all households.

A new website – 'Can-do Cities' - encouraging others to follow Leeds' example has been launched at [CanDoCities.org](http://CanDoCities.org).

It sets out the economic case for low carbon development not only for Leeds, but for each of the UK's 50 biggest cities and for all [local authorities](#) across the UK.

Full statistics are available for each of the 50 cities. Estimated annual

energy savings from profitable investments for the UK's core cities are as follows:

- London: £2.1 billion, equivalent to £240 per person
- Belfast: £105 million, equivalent to £316 per person
- Birmingham: £307 million, equivalent to £275 per person
- Bristol: £122 million, equivalent to £270 per person
- Cardiff: £129 million, equivalent to £353 per person
- Glasgow: £208 million, equivalent to £344 per person
- Leeds: £272 million, equivalent to £349 per person
- Liverpool: £132 million, equivalent to £281 per person
- Manchester: £146 million, equivalent to £277 per person
- Newcastle: £88 million, equivalent to £309 per person
- Nottingham: £84 million, equivalent to £266 per person
- Sheffield: £158 million, equivalent to £278 per person

Provided by University of Leeds

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