# New‑builds overheating as promised communal cooling and billing protections fail residents



Residents of a glass‑fronted new‑build in east London say the promise of built‑in cooling has not been delivered consistently, leaving some flats uncomfortably hot during recent heatwaves and exposing a wider faultline in how modern developments handle summer temperatures. The Evening Standard reported that interiors reached about 30°C for prolonged periods, with tenants describing disrupted sleep, health worries and expensive ad‑hoc fixes such as bespoke blinds. According to the article, the developer and building manager say systems are working as designed and that contractors have fixed individual faults where identified. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

Buyers and renters told the paper they were explicitly assured by developers that cooling units and mechanical ventilation would protect homes year‑round. Speaking to the Evening Standard, one resident, Gareth Humphreys, said the cooling provision had been ineffective and inconsistent across the block. “It was 30 degrees inside the flat for pretty much the entire two weeks or so. It never dropped,” he told the paper, adding that some neighbours had the promised cooling units while others did not. A Clarion Housing spokesperson told the Standard they had addressed units that were not working and were engaging with residents. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

The building’s technical and billing arrangements have compounded the problem. Residents told the Standard the block is heated and cooled from communal heat pumps and billed via top‑up (prepayment-style) meters rather than by individual gas boilers — a setup that, they say, leaves them exposed to higher and less predictable charges. The article reports a blunt resident observation: “you pay a lot more than you would if you had a boiler in your property.” That experience is consistent with consumer guidance showing heat networks can charge by metered consumption plus standing charges, often using prepayment or top‑up arrangements, and are not ordinarily covered by Ofgem’s domestic price cap. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [moneysavingexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

Campaign groups and consumer bodies warn this is not an isolated quirk but a structural gap in consumer protection. Heat Trust has repeatedly highlighted that hundreds of thousands of households on communal or district heating remain excluded from the domestic price cap and other emergency support, and that operators buying fuel on the commercial market can set tariffs that run well above capped domestic rates. Heat Trust has documented cases in which bills reached many pence per kilowatt hour and has called for urgent regulation to prevent excessive pricing and unfair retrospective billing. ([heattrust.org](https://www.heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

The problem of retrospective or “reconciliation” billing — where operators recalculated historic charges after moving to higher commercial rates and then attempted to recover the difference from residents — has already emerged in several developments, according to Guardian reporting. Tenants at some schemes were told past bills would be rebilled at the new tariff, in some cases amounting to significant sums and prompting legal and regulatory complaints. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has said it is working to introduce rules to prevent unfair back‑billing, and Ofgem is scheduled to bring heat networks into its regulatory remit, but campaigners say timetables are slow and interim protections are urgently needed. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/jan/08/tenants-with-shared-heat-systems-shocked-to-be-back-billed-for-hundreds?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [heattrust.org](https://www.heattrust.org/news-events/159-as-ofgem-s-price-cap-rises-urgent-action-still-needed-to-protect-half-a-million-homes-on-heat-networks?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

Beyond billing, the economics of heat pumps themselves complicate the picture. Public spending watchdogs and consumer‑facing outlets have warned that heat pumps — which run on electricity rather than gas — can be costly to buy and, depending on electricity prices, expensive to run. The National Audit Office and related reporting have found high upfront installation costs, limited consumer awareness and underperforming grant schemes have all slowed adoption, meaning many households may not see the promised long‑term savings and could face higher running costs in the short term. This helps explain residents’ complaints that communal heat‑pump systems can feel both inefficient in winter and expensive in summer if operators pass commercial electricity prices through to users. ([thisismoney.co.uk](https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-13210187/High-cost-heat-pumps-putting-customers-watchdog-warns.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/0c054c45-a59a-4b98-ac7b-404046c7182d?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

Some policy changes have improved fairness for conventional prepayment electricity and gas customers: the government removed the so‑called “prepayment premium” from 1 July 2023 so that households on pay‑as‑you‑go meters on mainstream energy supply no longer pay more on average than direct‑debit customers. However, that change does not automatically protect people on privately operated heat networks. MoneySavingExpert and other consumer guides note that many heat networks use bespoke top‑up or internal metering arrangements and sit outside the protections that apply to typical supplier‑customer contracts regulated by Ofgem, meaning those residents remain exposed even after the prepayment reforms. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prepayment-meter-customers-to-pay-less-for-energy-from-today?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [moneysavingexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

What the Leaside Lock case and others around the country illustrate is a collision between modern construction, climate change and current regulatory gaps. New builds are increasingly well insulated for winter, which is positive for energy bills and decarbonisation, but without adequate design for shading, through‑ventilation and summer cooling they can become ovens in heatwaves. Experts and the Climate Change Committee have urged the government to rebalance building standards and planning guidance to address overheating alongside winter efficiency, and consumer groups say regulation of heat networks must be accelerated so that residents have clearer rights on billing, switching and complaints. In the meantime, tenants and owners in affected blocks are left to manage higher bills and uncomfortable, sometimes unsafe, living conditions. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/aug/10/overheated-homes-why-uk-housing-is-dangerously-unprepared-for-impact-of-climate-crisis?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [moneysavingexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

Until the regulatory framework catches up, practical steps would reduce harm: clearer upfront disclosure by developers about how communal heating and cooling are supplied and billed; independent testing and certification of cooling systems before handover; tighter limits on retrospective billing; and faster introduction of Ofgem regulation or an interim price safeguard for heat‑network customers. Heat Trust and consumer advisers continue to press for those protections so that the promise of low‑carbon communal heating does not translate into poorer comfort and higher costs for the people who live in those homes. ([heattrust.org](https://www.heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap?utm_source=chatgpt.com), [moneysavingexpert.com](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/?utm_source=chatgpt.com))

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html), [[4]](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/jan/08/tenants-with-shared-heat-systems-shocked-to-be-back-billed-for-hundreds), [[3]](https://heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-13210187/High-cost-heat-pumps-putting-customers-watchdog-warns.html), [[3]](https://heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prepayment-meter-customers-to-pay-less-for-energy-from-today), [[4]](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap), [[4]](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/homesandproperty/property-news/newbuilds-heatwave-london-overheating-b1242633.html> - Evening Standard reports on overheating in a London new‑build where residents experienced indoor temperatures around 30°C during a heatwave. Tenants say cooling units promised by developers were ineffective or only installed in some flats, leaving others sweltering. The piece notes the building’s heat pumps and communal heating arrangements are not protected by the domestic energy price cap, and that residents on top‑up meters face higher charges compared with individual boilers. Interviews describe health and sleep disruption, expensive bespoke blinds, and management responses that some units were adjusted. The article highlights wider failure of regulations to address summer overheating, increasingly urgent.
3. <https://heattrust.org/news-events/172-hundreds-of-thousands-still-left-out-as-ofgem-announces-april-price-cap> - Heat Trust warns that hundreds of thousands of households on communal or district heating systems are excluded from Ofgem’s domestic energy price cap, leaving them vulnerable. The consumer body explains operators buy fuel on the commercial market, can set their own tariffs, and in some cases charged customers rates many times higher than capped domestic prices. Heat Trust highlights examples of bills reaching tens of pence per kilowatt hour and calls for urgent regulation, fair pricing and protection for heat network consumers. The piece describes the slow timetable for Ofgem oversight and the need for interim measures to protect residents.
4. <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/heat-networks/> - MoneySavingExpert’s guide explains what heat networks are and how they bill residents. It outlines billing methods including metered consumption plus standing charges, and notes some systems use prepayment or top‑up meters. The guide warns heat networks are not typically covered by Ofgem’s domestic price cap, meaning operators buying fuel on the commercial market may pass high costs to occupants. It highlights problems such as lack of switching options, billing opacity, poor customer service and intermittent subsidies. The page advises residents to check contracts, ask about metering and rights, and use Heat Trust’s tools to compare costs with individual gas boilers.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/jan/08/tenants-with-shared-heat-systems-shocked-to-be-back-billed-for-hundreds> - The Guardian/Observer reports that tenants connected to private heat networks have been shocked by retrospective re‑billing and steep tariff increases. Residents at several developments were told their historic charges would be recalculated after operators moved to higher commercial rates, sometimes increasing bills fourfold. The story explains heat networks are not covered by Ofgem’s price cap because suppliers buy energy on the commercial market, leaving customers exposed and unable to switch. Heat Trust and campaigners criticise back‑billing practices and call for regulatory protection. The piece covers examples and concerns about retrospective charging. Government promises to introduce rules for heat network customers.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prepayment-meter-customers-to-pay-less-for-energy-from-today> - GOV.UK press release announces from 1 July 2023 the government removed the ‘prepayment premium’ so customers on prepayment (top‑up) meters would on average no longer pay more than direct‑debit households. The change aimed to help around three million households, saving them roughly £21 a year by levelling standing charges, with the government covering the difference. It explains the rationale that prepayment customers, typically lower‑income, were unfairly charged for the higher costs of servicing meters. The release summarises measures accompanying the change and situates it within broader energy bill reforms and price cap adjustments intended to support vulnerable consumers in Britain.
7. <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-13210187/High-cost-heat-pumps-putting-customers-watchdog-warns.html> - This Is Money reports that the National Audit Office and other watchdogs warned heat pumps remain costly to buy and run, deterring household uptake despite government targets. The article explains heat pumps rely on electricity rather than gas, meaning running costs can be higher and households face larger upfront installation bills. It describes shortcomings in grant schemes such as the Boiler Upgrade Scheme and highlights that slower-than-expected deployment undermines policy goals. The piece quotes industry and watchdog concerns about affordability, the need for clearer incentives, and suggestions for targeted financial support to make heat pumps a viable alternative to gas boilers for more households.