

# Mild winter forecast offers hope for energy bills

Adam Vaughan Environment Editor

For households trying to resist turning up the thermostat, there may finally be some relief. An early forecast for this winter has found that it should be milder than usual, which could save homes and businesses millions of pounds.

Despite the government promising to limit typical annual energy spending to £2,500 and paying households £400 in instalments, the weather will still be key in determining final bills.

According to Christopher O'Reilly at the University of Reading, a 1C lower average temperature would equate to an extra overall cost of £1 billion, based on this month's price cap for gas. Even a fall of 0.5C would cause energy bills to go up by £500 million, which would amount to a significant increase for the typical household. "The numbers are pretty big, and the stakes are pretty high," he said.

Fortunately his outlook for winter, to be published by the university's department of meteorology, suggests a mild season. O'Reilly expects the average winter temperature for Britain to be between 5.2C and 5.7C — 0.5C to 1C warmer than the average for 1991-2020, and noticeably warmer than last winter.

The average temperature during the mildest winter in recent records, that of 1989, was 5.79C, according to Met Office data. Even if this winter is at the lower end of O'Reilly's forecast, it will rank in the top seven warmest winters.

He ran a six-month seasonal forecast using data and a climate model from the European Commission's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

To corroborate the findings O'Reilly looked at factors that can influence winter weather. One is the La Niña weather pattern, which records show tends to favour mild winters in Britain. November and December, in particular, would have above-average temperatures, the modelling suggests. The effect is less pronounced for January and February, "so milder conditions might be on the cards for the UK this winter, which would be good news", O'Reilly said.

Reading University is one of the leading centres for climate research. Paul Davies, chief meteorologist at the Met Office, said long-range predictions were hard to make with accuracy but he anticipated the greatest potential for colder spells next month and in December, with milder conditions in early 2023.

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