

Code of practice

Household customers

2018-19

Contents

Preface – a message from our Chief Executive	3
1. General	4
2. Our company	6
3. Drinking water, pipework responsibility and leakage	8
4. Disposal of wastewater	19
5. Our care for the environment	25
6. Water efficiency plan and initiatives	26
7. Our metering programme	28
8. Options when a meter can't be fitted	28
9. Water meters – additional information	29
10. Payment of charges	30
11. Customers who need financial assistance	39
12. Priority Services	43
13. If you have a complaint	44
14. Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS)	46
15. Customer Charter payments	46
16. Arbitration	49
17. Disputes determined by Ofwat	50
18. Contact numbers and opening hours	52
19. Privacy Notice	52

A message from our Chief Executive

We're proud to provide essential water and wastewater services to 4.6 million customers across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. This means sending out more than two million bills each year, operating more than 3,000 treatment works and pumping stations, and maintaining a vast network of underground water mains and sewers.

Every time we interact with you, we want you to be satisfied with the service we provide. We don't always get it right, but if there's a problem, we'll do our best to get it sorted out as soon as possible.

Our Code of Practice sets out the standards of service you should expect from us, along with details of how to make a claim, should something go wrong. It also includes useful contact information, what to do if you have problems with your water supply, details of pipe ownership and advice about how to deal with a leak or even a flooding incident.

There's additional information about our charges. Whether you own a home, you're renting or you're the landlord, we've broken down how they're calculated, based on what type of account you hold with us eg metered or unmetered, water only or wastewater only. Details of our various payment schemes and tariffs are also clearly described.

We've also included information about how to be more water efficient, prevent blockages from causing bad smells and flooding in your home, and tips on how to deal with hard water and a number of home plumbing issues.

This Code of Practice is updated every year so it really is the best place to find answers to all your questions about Southern Water, our services and your rights as our customer. I hope you'll find the information we've gathered together here useful and keep it for your reference.

Ian McAulay
Chief Executive Officer

This Code of Practice is specifically for household customers.

1. General

The contents of this code don't form part of a contract and don't create a contract between us and any of our customers.

The contents of this code are not intended to be in conflict with any relevant regulations made under the Water Industry Act 1991 or other legislation. In the event of any apparent conflict, the provisions of the regulations or legislation will prevail. You won't be able to claim payment or credit under both this code and any relevant regulations to the extent that the code and the regulations apply to similar matters.

The Water Industry Act also gives you the right, in certain circumstances, to take legal proceedings against us for any loss or damage caused to you by our failure to comply with certain duties under the act.

1.1 Introduction

Southern Water Services Limited is a water and wastewater services provider licensed under the Water Industry Act 1991. We're a regulated business, which protects your interests and strengthens your rights as a customer:

How does this happen?

- Our licence, issued by the government, governs the way we operate our business and also controls the extent to which we can vary our charges each year.
- The government's Drinking Water Inspectorate ensures we meet standards set by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for drinking water quality.
- The Environment Agency regulates how much water we can abstract from rivers, reservoirs and underground sources. It also specifies the quantity and quality of effluent we can discharge to rivers and the sea.
- The government-appointed independent Water Services Regulation Authority (WSRA), also known as Ofwat, ensures that customers' interests are protected and we comply with our licence by:
 - controlling the overall changes we can make to our charges
 - approving the standards of service we must provide
 - providing guidelines for information we provide to customers.

This Code of Practice is a requirement of condition G of our licence. It's produced in line with Ofwat guidelines. We also consult with the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) on this document.

CCWater is the customer watchdog and it represents customers of water and sewerage companies in England and Wales. CCWater works to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything we do.

1.2 Our promises to household customers

We're committed to providing excellent service. In 2015, at the start of our five-year business plan (known as our price review period), we had conversations with more than 34,000 of our customers.

This feedback helped us define six priorities and 26 promises, with measurable outcomes and performance targets for our teams to work towards. This five year period will see us spend more than £3 billion improving services – with £1.8bn invested in new or improved assets, equivalent to £1,000 for every property in our region.

Our promises to you:

- Reduce in bill queries by 2020.
- Provide better information about what we do, why we do it, what it costs and how we're providing value for money.
- Efficiency savings made during 2015 to 2020 to help keep bills as low as possible.
- Customers in genuine financial hardship provided with improved support.
- Direct compensation paid when we let you down.
- Quick and effective resolution of your queries.
- Improved service to you and your community.
- No restrictions on water use, unless there are at least two dry winters in a row.
- Reduce leakage by 2020.
- No increase in the average time you are without water, for example, because of a burst water main.
- Maintain compliant drinking water quality standards.
- Help reduce the effect of hard water in homes.
- Reduce the number of blockages in our sewer network.
- Reduce the number of sewer flooding inside your homes by 2020.
- Reduce 'pollution incidents' affecting local rivers, streams and beaches caused by our operations by 2020.
- Aim for 100% compliance by our wastewater treatment works within required standards.
- Increase the number of beaches with 'good' bathing water quality by 2020.
- Maintain the proportion of renewable energy we use.
- Reduce the amount of water we take from the environment.
- Reduce average water use by 10% by 2020 with better advice on saving water, energy and money.
- Improve advice on how to prevent blocked drains to help reduce blockages.

2. Our company

2.1 Your water and wastewater services company

We provide drinking water and wastewater services to 4.6 million customers in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and small parts of Wiltshire, Berkshire and Surrey.

You may receive one or both services from us. If a service is provided by another water company, you'll receive a separate bill from them in most instances, unless we have a joint billing arrangement.

Visit southernwater.co.uk/your-area and enter your postcode to find out if you're a Southern Water customer.

The addresses and telephone numbers of other water companies are given on their bills. Direct links to all other water companies are available at southernwater.co.uk/area-of-operation.

2.2 How you can contact us

If you're moving home, have an enquiry or complaint about your water service, wastewater service or your bill, contact our Customer Service team:

Online

You can now create an online account with us at southernwater.co.uk/your-account. With an online account you'll easily be able to:

- pay your bill
- opt for paperless billing
- change your account details
- check your usage history
- tell us you're moving
- set up a Direct Debit
- submit a meter-reading; and much more.

Live Chat

A Live Chat option is also available at southernwater.co.uk during office hours Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

By email

If you have a question about your bill, please complete our feedback form at southernwater.co.uk/feedback

For water supply and wastewater service questions, please complete the form at southernwater.co.uk/i-have-an-enquiry

By phone

If you have a question about your bill, call us on **0330 303 0277**, Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm and Saturday 8.30am to 2pm.

We have a Minicom service (for the deaf or hard of hearing) on **0330 303 1265**, Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm.

There's also an automated line on **0330 303 1263** (24 hours a day) which enables you to pay your bill, tell us you're moving house, or apply for a Direct Debit or a payment card.

If you're struggling to pay your bill, we're here to help and have a range of schemes and tariffs available for those in financial difficulty. Call us **Freephone** on **0800 027 0363** – Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm and Saturday, 9am to 1pm.

Emergencies

If there's a problem with your water supply or wastewater services, you can call us 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on **0330 303 0368**.

Write to us

Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG

By fax

Contact us on **0203 047 9147**.

2.3 Our rights of entry

Under certain circumstances we have the right to enter properties and land. This is usually so that we can investigate compliance with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 (WSR 1999) or take samples to check for water quality.

We'll always call at a reasonable time and give you appropriate notice. We'll contact you 24 hours before investigation of regulatory compliance or in the case of monitoring water quality. In all other cases we'll give seven days' notice. If we've not given you appropriate notice you can refuse entry, unless there's an emergency.

2.4 Crime prevention

All of our employees carry Southern Water photo identity cards. Always ask to see it if you're not sure about the person knocking at your door.

Before you answer the door be **AWARE**:

- Attach your door chain before opening the door to strangers
- Water company employees always carry identification
- Always look for a company uniform or vehicle displaying a logo
- Remember, if you're unsure, keep them out and call us on **0330 303 0368** (24/7)
- Employees of Southern Water will always be happy to wait.

3 Drinking water, pipework, responsibility and leakage

3.1 Water quality

All water we supply is high quality. The chemical and bacteriological quality of water is specified in regulations issued by the Secretary of State, based on European Union Directives. We must supply water that complies with these regulations.

3.2 Water quality records

We must regularly sample and test the water we supply to you to comply with these regulations. If we get a complaint and take a sample of your tap water, we'll always give you details of our analysis and the required water quality standards.

You can see a water quality report for your area at southernwater.co.uk/about-your-water where you can click on our interactive map. Alternatively, you can request a copy by contacting service enquiries on **0330 303 0368** (or see **Section 2.2** for our full contact details).

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) carries out a rigorous audit of our sampling and test records each year. It also checks that we've responded properly to customers' complaints on water quality. More information about the DWI is available at dwi.gov.uk.

3.3 Quality problems with your water supply

Please note that the following circumstances are exceptional.

If we have any concerns over the quality of water supplied, we may ask you to boil your water before using it.

In very rare circumstances we may advise you not to drink the water. If this becomes necessary, we'll notify you by post or through the local media and arrange for an alternative water supply to be made available until the problem has been dealt with.

If you believe your water has become unfit to drink, contact us immediately, 24/7 on **0330 303 0368**. Don't drink the water until you've spoken to us.

See **Section 14.3** for our Guaranteed Standards of service relating to Water Quality.

3.4 Source of water

We abstract nearly 70% of water from underground sources. The remaining 30% is taken from above ground sources, such as rivers or reservoirs.

3.5 Quantity

We're required to provide a continuous supply of water for your household needs – drinking, washing, cooking, heating and sanitation – and for outside use, such as watering the garden and

washing the car. We aim to ensure that, in normal circumstances, you may use a hosepipe if you wish. See below for information on temporary water use restrictions during times of drought. We operate in an area that's seriously water stressed. In order to help conserve available water supplies, we've installed a water meter at most household properties in our water supply area. An important part of this metering programme has been a drive to make customers aware of the importance of using water wisely and the impact this can have on their metered bills.

In line with our metering policy, we'll be discontinuing the old unmetered basis of charge, relating to the former rateable value of the property shown in the valuation list in 1990.

Owing to the individual supply arrangements, it's not possible to fit a meter at every property. In these cases, we'll provide an assessed metered charge based on the number of bedrooms in your property.

For further information, visit southernwater.co.uk/metering-programme.

3.6 Water restrictions

Our water supply sources are designed to standards that provide reliable supplies to meet normal demand under drought conditions, which might occur once in 50 years. To provide the assets to meet greater demand would cost more and the extra capacity would sit idle most of the time.

During prolonged drought we may have to restrict use of hosepipes for specific activities (as described in **Section 14.6**) through the imposition of Temporary Use Bans to conserve water supplies so that everyone can continue to receive enough for essential purposes. You may still water your garden using watering cans and buckets. If we do have to introduce Temporary Use Bans, this will apply to all household customers within the affected water resource area and include those who have a water meter.

We aim to ensure that these are kept to a minimum by reducing leakage from the distribution system and developing new sources to meet the growth in demand. We've also invested heavily in large water transfer pipelines linking our supply areas so water can be moved around. Where we need to impose restrictions, we'll ensure all affected customers are informed about when and how restrictions will be applied and when they'll be lifted.

3.7 Supply interruptions

Sometimes we have to interrupt the water supply to carry out essential maintenance work to our mains. Normally, we'll always try to let you know when your water will be cut off and when it will be restored. Occasionally, in an emergency, this may not be possible.

If you find your water has been cut off, visit southernwater.co.uk for updates or call **0330 303 0368** for further information. If the interruption lasts for more than 24 hours, we're required to provide an alternative water supply (See Guaranteed Standards Scheme for interruptions in **Section 14**).

As part of our commitment to reduce wastage from the distribution system we carry out leakage checks at night. If we're making checks in your area, your supply may be interrupted for up to 45 minutes between 1am and 4am. Because the disruption is slight, we do not normally warn customers in advance. However, if you regularly require a water supply between these hours and you believe an interruption would cause you problems, please contact service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**.

3.8 Water pressure

We must supply water at a pressure that ensures it reaches the top of every building, except where this is greater than the height to which it will flow by gravity from our service reservoir.

To achieve this, we aim to supply water at the stop tap on the boundary of your property at a minimum pressure of 10 metres head. This gives a minimum flow from a ground-floor tap of nine litres per minute, equivalent to filling a one-gallon bucket in 30 seconds.

In practice we aim to do better than this. Sometimes lower pressure can occur, but this should not be for more than one hour in 24. If the pressure falls below seven metres static head for more than one hour, on more than one occasion in any 28-day period, we'll pay £25 under the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (see **Section 14** for further details).

Pressure and flow are affected by several factors:

- The height of your property in relation to our water main and our service reservoir
- The condition of your private supply pipe
- If the stop tap is not turned on sufficiently
- Whether your property shares a supply pipe with any other property
- Peak demand conditions.

If you think your water pressure is too low, contact service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**. We'll investigate the cause free of charge, and advise what action can be taken.

3.9 Pipe ownership and responsibilities

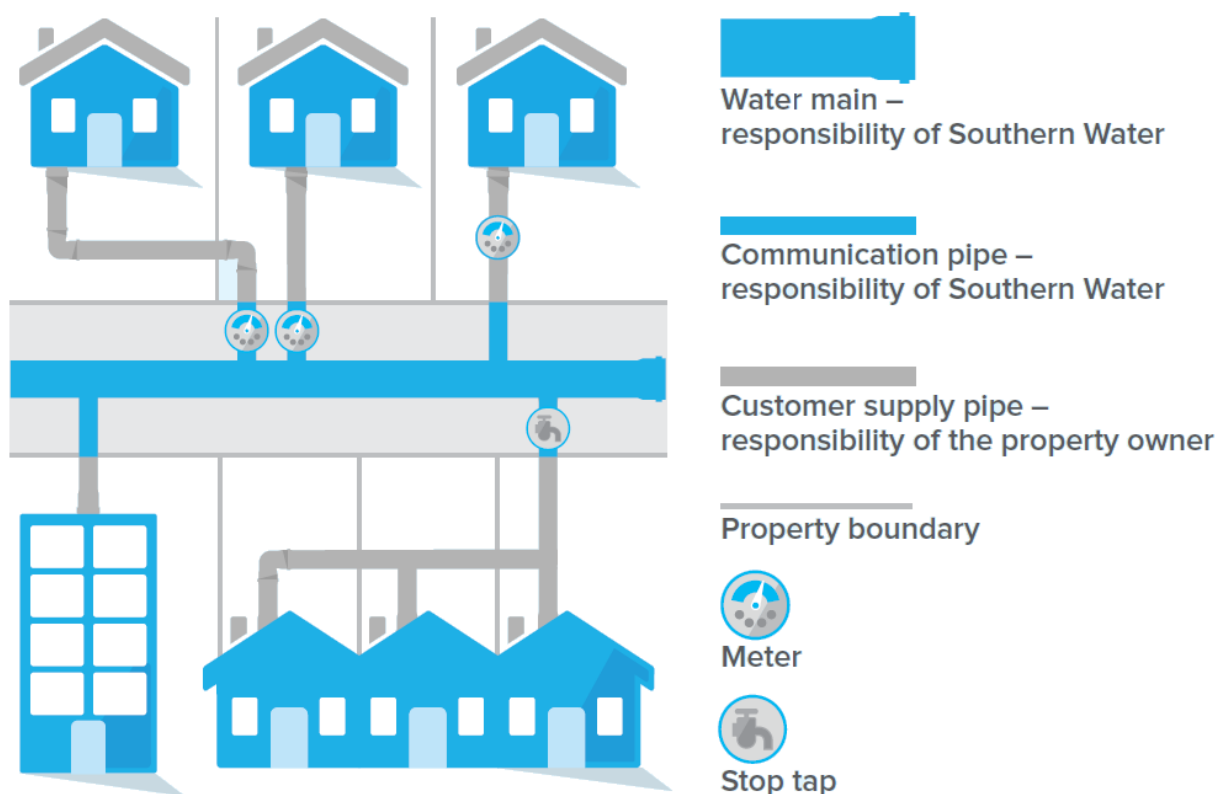
We own and maintain the water mains that carry water to homes and businesses. Your property is connected to our water main by a service pipe. Responsibility for this underground pipe is split between you and us as shown in the diagram on the following page.

You're legally responsible for the section of pipe from the boundary of the public highway to your property – this is called the supply pipe. You may share the supply pipe with other people and this means you also share responsibility for leaks with any neighbours supplied by the same pipe.

We're responsible for the section between the water main and the boundary of your property – frequently the front garden wall or fence. This is called the communication pipe and usually incorporates our stop tap box, which is located in the pavement or verge. This stop tap is used for turning off the mains water supply. Often this is where a water meter may be located.

It's your responsibility to maintain your supply pipe in good order, even when it runs under other properties before reaching yours. Most properties have a separate stop tap where the supply pipe enters the building. You're advised to locate and operate this stop tap to ensure it can be shut in an emergency.

This is particularly important in advance of any planned works you're undertaking inside your property (eg a bathroom or kitchen replacement). An approved plumber should check this for you and be competent to repair or replace as required. If we need to send a member of our team to check your external stop tap and carry out follow-on work to make your external stop tap operable, this may delay your planned work (see **Section 3.11** for how we may be able to help you).



Unfortunately, not all supply arrangements are this simple. You may share a communication pipe with one or more of your neighbours. This length of pipe is our responsibility, but the supply pipes connected to it are the responsibility of the customers sharing the supply.

Sometimes customers find shared supplies inadequate. We'll lay a separate communication pipe free of charge from our main to the street boundary where the following conditions apply:

- Where the supply fails to meet the flow and pressure criteria
- Where lead is present
- Where the supply is being compromised by excessive leaks.

In all cases the extent of our work will be limited to the provision of a separate communication pipe and/or boundary box. You'll be required to separate all private pipework at your cost.

If you wish to take advantage of this offer, call us on **0330 303 0368**.

We prefer there to be a separate supply pipe to each individual property. We may have to ask you to provide a separate supply pipe in the following circumstances:

- The shared supply pipe has become defective or insufficient as to need replacement.
- New or converted properties are connected to it.
- There's been interference with a customer's supply.
- If charges are outstanding.

In these cases, you'll need to provide the separate supply pipe yourself or bear the cost of the work undertaken. If you dispute our requirement for the supply pipe to be separated, the matter can be referred to Ofwat for determination (see **Section 16** for details).

If you're buying a property, make sure your solicitor checks the arrangements for the water supply and charges, particularly if the property is jointly supplied or the pipe crosses someone else's property. New properties that we supply should have a separate service pipe, even if they are flats formed from the conversion of an existing building.

3.10 Pipe-laying

We may want to lay or work on a pipe in land that you own or occupy. We have statutory powers to do this and have rights of entry to the land to lay and maintain the pipe. We'll always try to fit in with owners' or occupiers' reasonable requirements and act in accordance with our Code of Practice for the Exercise of Pipe-Laying Powers.

This leaflet is available at southernwater.co.uk/Media/Default/PDFs/CodePracPipeLaying.pdf.

3.11 Leakage in our system

We're committed to ensuring the efficient use of available water resources. We have a legal duty to promote water efficiency and have a water efficiency programme, as described in the Water Resources Management Plan – southernwater.co.uk/water-resources-plan.

Reducing water loss, repairing leaks on our mains and preventing bursts are a top priority for us and we're proud of our record in this area. We have specialist teams working day and night to check for hidden leaks in our underground pipes.

If water is leaking from your outside stop tap, the water meter or the joints around the meter, we're responsible for putting this right.

You can help us by reporting any such leaks, free of charge 24-hours a day on: **0800 820 999** or **0330 303 0146** (calls charged at local rate).

We aim to repair visible leaks as soon as possible. Those reported during a working day will be attended and inspected by the end of the next working day. Leaks reported out of normal working hours will be attended within the next two working days. We aim to repair 80% of leaks within five days – sooner if it's a severe leak.

3.12 Leakage on pipework owned by customers

This section sets out our Code of Practice for dealing with water leaks at household and mixed-use premises. It explains who is responsible for dealing with water leaks and what we'll do if a leak is found.

Water leaks are a waste of a precious resource and, if left to run, may cause damage to your property. The cost of putting right damage caused by a long-running leak is always far greater than dealing with it promptly.

Section 3.9 explains that the property owner is responsible for the supply pipe and internal fittings and therefore any repair or maintenance of these rests with them. We understand that finding and fixing a leak on underground pipework is a daunting prospect for many customers. While we do provide some help with this (see below) we recommend that you consider arranging suitable cover through your household insurance or by taking out a specialist scheme that covers all types of plumbing repairs.

If you consider that maintenance is required on your pipework or you are arranging an emergency repair we recommend that you always hire a qualified plumber. This will assure you that all water regulations are met.

You can find a local qualified plumber through the WaterSafe scheme (watersafe.org.uk) or call **0333 207 9030**.

There are some basic precautions that customers can take to help prevent leakage, such as protecting pipes with insulation in winter. For more information, visit southernwater.co.uk/prepare-for-winter.

Where the supply pipe is in poor condition, and therefore at risk of leaking again, it may be advisable to relay the pipe rather than repair. We can help, call us on **0330 303 0368**.

3.12.1 How do I spot a leak?

Apart from the visible signs, such as water bubbling out of the ground or a very damp patch in your garden on a dry day, there are other ways of checking whether there's a leak.

If your water supply is metered you can carry out a simple check. Take a reading from the meter, then either turn off the supply indoors or make sure you've no taps or water-using appliances (eg washing machine or dishwasher) running.

After one hour, take another meter reading. If the reading is higher, you probably have a leak. Depending on where the leak is, you may also notice a drop in pressure at peak demand or a slight hissing noise, particularly at night when it is quiet. To find out how you can test for a leak, visit: southernwater.co.uk/testing-for-a-leak or call us on: **0330 303 0277**.

3.12.2 Leakage detection service

Where a leak is suspected but is not visible because it's below ground, we offer a free leakage detection service, lasting up to one hour.

Our equipment is very effective but we cannot guarantee we will find the exact source of the leak. We'll ensure that we update you with the results of our detection work. See **Section 3.12.3** for more information, including the timescales for any repair.

If you require any of these services or would like further information, please call service enquiries on **0330 303 0277**.

3.12.3 Help we offer - free leak fixes for 2018

We'll be fixing leaks between customers' properties and our water mains for free in 2018. Homeowners are usually responsible for repairs to a property's supply pipe (please see southernwater.co.uk/leaks-at-your-home), but we're offering one fix per property this year - to help save precious water in our water-stressed region.

How to get a free pipe repair

It's quick and easy to make use of this service in 2018. To be entitled to a repair, you'll need to be the homeowner and live at the property (this offer isn't available to landlords).

The leak must also be external, on a pipe under 50m long and not obstructed by steps, trees, ponds, buildings or something similar.

- If you think you have a leak, phone us on **0330 303 0368**.
- If you meet the criteria above, we'll come to assess the repair.
- If we can make the repair, you'll need to sign our agreement before we start.

After we've fixed your leak

After we've repaired your pipework, we'll reinstate the surface. Where the surface is grassed or slab/block paving we'll carefully remove it during our excavation work and re-use the existing materials.

Please be aware that where surfaces require new concrete or tarmac, this will not look exactly the same as before due to the effects of weathering and the varied colours of materials.

Where surfaces were already damaged or require specialist finishes, customers may also take the opportunity to buy new materials or employ a contractor to finish the work.

3.12.4 Responsibilities for leaking water

Once the leak has been found, you (or the property owner, if you're a tenant) should arrange to have the leak repaired as soon as possible. If you don't make the repair within 30 days then you won't be able to claim the full leakage allowance (see **section 3.12.6**). If your insurance doesn't specify a particular contractor, you should get the work done by a reputable contractor of your choice. Websites such as checkatrade.com or watersafe.org.uk can help you find a qualified plumber.

Where your supply pipe runs under someone else's private land, it's still your responsibility to fix and you'll need to obtain agreement to dig on their land. Where you share your supply pipe with one or more other properties you'll have shared liability for the repair.

We have a legal duty to prevent loss of water from our supply system, so if you (or the owner) refuse to repair a leak or prevent us from carrying out a free repair, we may be forced to take the following action:

- Repair the leak and send you a bill for the work carried out

- Consider legal proceedings under Section 75 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (see legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/56/section/75)
- As a final action, we reserve the right to disconnect the water supply.

3.12.5 Leakage checks when a meter is first installed

When we fit a meter, we check to establish if there's any leakage on the supply pipe. If a leak is detected and can be repaired without further excavation at that time, it will be done at our expense.

If a leak is detected that can't be repaired without further excavation, we'll let you know about the leak and help you, where possible, through the process of repair.

3.12.6 Making adjustments to a metered bill

If you have a water meter, your bills will be based on the volume of water the meter records including any water wasted or lost through leaks from your pipework.

If you're paying metered charges and have had a leak, we'll make a one-time adjustment to both water supply and wastewater charges to reflect the extra amount of water recorded because of the leak, once it has been repaired. We normally recalculate your metered charges based on past usage. Where there's no record of past consumption, the adjustment will be based on two readings taken over a period of time.

If this isn't possible, an estimate will be based upon the number of people using the supply. Charges will normally be adjusted to cover the period when the supply was leaking. For those customers who haven't previously received a bill, the recalculated charges will be backdated to the beginning of the billing period.

There will be no adjustment of charges if any of the following applies:

- Another leak occurs after an adjustment for an earlier leak
- You (or someone else living with you) caused the leak through negligence
- You knew, or could reasonably be expected to have known, that there was a leak and you failed to repair it or tell us about it
- The leak occurred because of faulty pipes or fittings inside your home
- You did not repair the leak within a reasonable period (30 days for full allowance, up to 90 days for partial allowance).

If you believe you may be entitled to a bill adjustment after making repairs, contact our Customer Service centre within three months of receiving the bill in question. Our contact details, in **Section 2.2** of this document, are shown on our bills and at southernwater.co.uk/do-it-online.

3.12.7 If your water is supplied by another company

If your water is supplied by another company, you should contact them about any suspected or obvious leak.

If your water supplier makes an adjustment to your water charges, they'll send us details about the adjustment. You may be entitled to a bill adjustment for wastewater charges once we've received details from your water supplier. We'll review the circumstances, and where appropriate, make an

adjustment. In some circumstances, such as the water from an obvious or prolonged leak returning to the public sewer, we may write to you and explain that our charges remain payable.

3.13 Lead pipes

Some older properties still have lead supply pipes and internal plumbing. Some lead can be transferred from them into the water (see **Note 1** below). In areas where lead pipework is more prevalent, special treatment has been installed to reduce the level of lead picked up from pipework.

If as part of our routine testing, or at your request, we find a raised lead concentration in the water from your kitchen tap, we'll tell you. We must also tell your local environmental health officer. We'll replace the communication pipe serving your property free of charge if it's lead. The householder/property owner is responsible for replacing the supply pipe and any internal lead pipes.

You should contact your local council, which may have grants available to assist you with the replacement of lead pipes.

Note 1: High lead level can have adverse health impact. We therefore recommend that lead supply pipes are replaced. Please visit the Drinking Water Inspectorate's website at dwi.gov.uk for further information.

3.14 Mains records

We maintain digitised records showing the location of our water infrastructure. Individual developers may wish to view these records before beginning construction work. The records are available for inspection, free of charge, during working hours. Please call **0330 303 0276** or email searches@southernwater.co.uk to make an appointment and to discuss the most convenient office for you to visit.

3.15 Electrical earthing

Safe earthing of electrical appliances in your house is your responsibility and your water service pipe should not be used for earthing your household electrical installation.

Unfortunately, many houses, particularly those built before 1966, still rely on the water pipe as an earth. If your house is one of these, please remember that the increasing use of plastic water pipes reduces the effectiveness of your water pipe as an earth.

Where we have carried out work on your communication pipe, we will notify you, advising you of the possible effect on your electrical earthing. We also strongly advise you to have your electrical system tested as soon as possible, and brought up to standard if found to be defective.

You should consult your electricity supply company for advice on electrical earthing.

3.16 New water connections

We're required to connect your property to a water main at your request – although terms and conditions apply. You're required to pay for it, but we'll provide the connection into the main and the communication pipe from the main to the external stop tap.

You're not allowed to make the connection into our main yourself and we must lay any part of your supply pipe that involves digging up the public highway. For a new or altered connection, call our service enquiries line on **0330 303 0119** or for more information visit southernwater.co.uk/property-and-developers.

All new properties must have a separate communication pipe and a water meter. Once we've agreed to provide a new connection and payment has been received, where we can, we'll:

- Make the connection as soon as possible once the supply pipe is laid and within 21 days
- Make the connection within 14 days of you contacting us if the whole pipe from the property to our water main is already laid.

If we fail to connect your house within the time frame stated above and without a valid reason, we may be liable to you for loss or damage caused.

3.17 New connection costs

Costs and charges are payable for new connections. These are:

- the cost of making the connection to the main.
- the cost of providing and laying our communication pipe together with a charge for installing a meter.
- an infrastructure charge which contributes to the cost of local reinforcement to the distribution system. The maximum amount we can charge is fixed by our licence and is adjusted annually in line with the Retail Price Index. It's payable for newly-connected premises. A separate infrastructure charge is payable for any connection to the sewerage system.
- Where a site was previously developed and there's been a supply to the site within the previous five years, there may be a credit applied to the infrastructure charges. These credits will be calculated based on the information provided on the Application for New Connection Estimate form, available at southernwater.co.uk/water-main-connections.

Further information concerning these costs and charges is available by calling our service enquiries line on **0330 303 0119**.

If we can't decide whether our connection costs were incurred reasonably, the issue can be referred to Ofwat for determination. A dispute over the terms of a condition that we've imposed for the purposes of metering can be referred to arbitration or, if we can't agree on an arbitrator, this can be determined by Ofwat. See **Section 16**.

3.18 New water mains

If you need a connection to an existing water main, you must lay or extend the supply pipe to a point close to that main. Alternatively, if your property is some distance away and, particularly if there are other properties involved, you may prefer us to lay an extension to the existing main along public highways nearer to your property. This would mean you have a shorter length of private supply pipe for which you remain responsible. You can ask us to do this whether you're the owner or the occupier of your property.

However, you must meet or underwrite the costs of a new water main. This means you will have to pay any difference between the income we receive from charges for water supplied from the main and our reasonable costs in providing the main.

You may choose to pay the amount as a lump sum or by instalments over 12 years. We'll require a deposit from you before beginning the work. We must pay interest on any monies we hold for longer than three months, at a rate set by Ofwat.

We have to provide the main within three months of your request. If we break this deadline and you suffer loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If we can't agree the amount you need to pay or the amount of security you should give, either of us can refer the matter to Ofwat. In some circumstances your local council may be prepared to request a water main on your behalf.

For more information or to arrange for a quote, please visit southernwater.co.uk/water-main-connections, or contact us on **0330 303 0119**.

3.19 Self lay water mains

We'll also consider proposals from developers or their agents for new water mains and services for later management by us. This applies to design, installation and commissioning of new water mains and services to supply new or existing developments with water.

When considering proposals we'll work to agree the most appropriate arrangements, taking into account statutory responsibilities, those elements of work the developer wishes to undertake directly and any other practical considerations.

Once we take over responsibility of main you'll receive an asset payment from us. This payment will be the present value of the income we expect to get from the properties connected to the main over the next 12 years. This figure is agreed before work begins. Further information is available at southernwater.co.uk/self-lay.

3.20 Protection of water supplies against contamination

Water Supply Regulations are designed to prevent potable water being contaminated. They also prevent waste, undue consumption, misuse and interference with water meters. A short explanation of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 (WSR 1999) is available from our service enquiries team – please call **0330 303 0368**.

- All plumbing work carried out on your premises needs to comply with the regulations.
- All new materials or equipment installed need to comply with the regulations. The Water Regulations Advisory Scheme publishes a list of fittings that comply with these requirements at wras.co.uk/directory.
- You should specify to any contractor you employ that all work should be undertaken in accordance with the regulations. Ideally, you should use a contractor who is a member of the Water Industry Approved Plumber Scheme (WIAPS) – see wras.co.uk/consumers/approved_plumber_scheme.

- If new or modified plumbing doesn't comply with our regulations, this may be a criminal offence which we'll require you to put it right. In an emergency, we can disconnect your supply. If you use a plumber who is a member of WIAPS, they will be responsible for any such criminal liability.

Remember, the Water Fittings Regulations are made to protect the quality of the water we supply and are important to ensure the water supply does not become contaminated with potential harm to health.

4 Disposal of wastewater

4.1 Sewerage services

We own and operate the public sewers, which take wastewater from your drains to wastewater treatment works for treatment and disposal. We do this in accordance with legal standards set and monitored by the Department for Environment, Foods and Rural Affairs. The Environment Agency monitors our compliance with environmental legislation and enters its results in a public register.

We have several types of sewers:

- **Surface water sewers** that carry rainwater from roofs and hardstandings directly into rivers and the sea.
- **Foul sewers** that carry lavatory waste and used water from cooking, cleaning and washing to wastewater treatment works.
- **Combined sewers** that carry both of the above to wastewater treatment works.
- **Lateral drains** that carry foul sewage or surface water from the boundary of your property to the main sewer.

4.2 Sewer ownership

We're responsible for maintaining public sewers and lateral drains (the section of a drain that serves only a single property but is outside the boundaries of the property). These are shown on the public sewer map below.

Before 1 October 2011, we weren't responsible for private sewers and lateral drains. The government introduced legislation in the 2003 Water Act, which came into effect on 1 October 2011, transferring all private sewers (pipes serving two or more properties) and lateral drains to water companies.

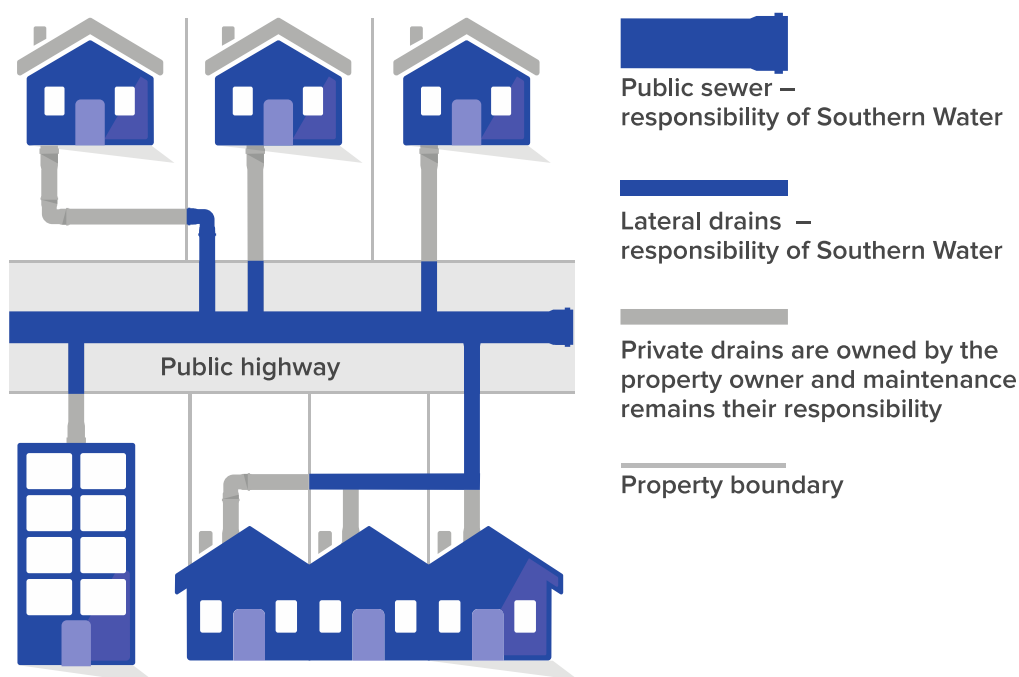
These recently transferred private sewers and lateral drains may not show on our maps until they have been surveyed and mapped.

Our sewer records are available for inspection, free of charge, at local council offices. In addition, extracts can be obtained through the post, for a small fee. Contact our service enquiries team on: **0330 303 0368**.

Most public sewers are situated beneath roads or public open spaces, but some run through private gardens and we have a right of access to maintain, repair or replace them. We also have legal protection against anyone building over or near to our sewers.

If we need to lay or maintain pipes on your land we'll observe our Code of Practice for the Exercise of Pipe-Laying Powers. Copies of the code will be sent with any notice in relation to the exercise of our powers. Should a dispute arise, refer to **Section 16** of this Code of Practice.

Household customers are responsible for all drains within the property boundary which serve their property.



If you're buying a property that is connected to a sewer, make sure that your solicitor asks whether your drain or private sewer connects to the public sewer and where. You'll be responsible for the maintenance, repair or replacement of the privately owned length and you may want to check its condition.

For any problems with the public sewerage system, contact service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**.

4.3 Blockages in the sewers

We're responsible for clearing any blockages in public sewers and lateral drains, and we use specialist contractors to do this. If in doubt contact us and we'll provide you with an extract from our sewer records, which will show the public sewers in your area. We'll arrange to have public sewers cleared promptly. If our sewer crews identify that the blockage is not our responsibility, for example, it's in a private drain, then we'll have to refer you to a private contractor to clear the blockage.

We're not responsible for clearing blockages in private drains (pipes serving only your property, and within the boundaries of your property) and you need to pay any contractors you call in to unblock them.

4.4 Protection against flooding from sewers

Public sewers are designed with enough capacity to protect homes from the risk of flooding. However, flooding from sewers can occur for a variety of reasons, for example following blockages, collapses, vandalism or exceptional weather.

Useful tips about what you should and shouldn't be putting down your sinks and toilets are available at: [southernwater.co.uk/keep-it-clear](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/keep-it-clear). In the event of an internal or external flooding incident, contact our service enquiries team on **0330 303 0368** at any time.

All customers are advised to maintain insurance cover against loss or damage to their buildings and contents as a result of flooding. If effluent from one of our sewers enters your building you're entitled to an automatic payment or credit equal to your annual wastewater charge for the current year (subject to a minimum of £150 and maximum of £1000) for each event.

In the event of external flooding, you're entitled to a payment or credit equivalent to half of your wastewater charges (£75 minimum to a maximum of £500), but you need to claim the payment within three months on the incident. A claim form can be downloaded at [southernwater.co.uk/media/default/PDFs/ExternalFlooding_ClaimForm.pdf](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/default/PDFs/ExternalFlooding_ClaimForm.pdf).

These payments won't apply if flooding is caused by exceptional weather, industrial action, your own actions or any defect, inadequacy or blockage in your drains or private sewers. If you suffer losses as a result of flooding from a sewer, contact your insurance company in the first instance.

Southern Water isn't responsible for the damage that flooding may cause, but we'll assist with disinfection after an event to help get you back on your feet. This assistance will be provided as part of the first response following your call to report the flooding incident. However, if we're experiencing a high volume of incidents, there may be a delay in providing this assistance.

See **Section 14.4** for full details of our Guaranteed Standards of service and the conditions relating to sewer flooding.

4.5 Adopted sewers

Section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act requires all new sewers and lateral drains to be designed and constructed to the Mandatory Build Standard (published prior to this legislation).

Before making a connection to the sewerage system you need approval from us (a **Section 106 agreement**) and you'll also need to have approval of the design of the proposed works and an agreement from us to adopt on completion (a **Section 104 agreement**).

If you want to make a connection to the sewerage system, whether for a single house or development site, contact us as soon as possible.

Sewers for Adoption, published by WRc, sets out in more detail the requirements for sewer design and is currently being revised to take into account these legislative changes. A Sewers for Adoption package containing guidance notes and an application form can be downloaded from

southernwater.co.uk/adoption-of-new-sewers-or-pumping-station or is available from our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0368**

We're not responsible for sewers that haven't been adopted. If you think that we've imposed unreasonable conditions for adoption, you can appeal to Ofwat – see **Section 16**.

4.6 New connections to the public sewer

As the owner or occupier of your property, you're entitled to have a drain or private sewer connected to an appropriate public sewer. You need to give us notice if you want to do this – contact us on **0330 303 0119**, or visit southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection for a sewer connection application pack, which details the procedure to follow:

- The construction details should be in accordance with the specification supplied in the application pack.
- Once we've received your notice we'll tell you within 21 days if your proposals are acceptable. No connection should be attempted within this period without our specific agreement.
- We may choose to carry out the connection works ourselves. If this is the case, we'll tell you within 14 days of receipt of the completed application form.
- If we're not making the connection ourselves, once you've received approval from us, we ask that you give us 48 hours' notice of your intention to start the work.
- Charges are payable as outlined in **Section 4.7** below.
- Any person making an illegal connection into a public sewer is committing an offence and may be liable to a fine. Also, we can disconnect the drain or sewer and recover the costs of doing so.
- If we find a sewer has been wrongly connected, eg a foul water drain connected to a surface water sewer, we'll ask for it to be fixed immediately or disconnected.
- It's also illegal to connect land drains, draining unsurfaced areas, to the public sewers as this can cause flooding to other properties.

4.7 New sewer connection payments

Costs and charges are payable to us for connections to the public sewer. What these are for and when they should be paid, are as follows:

- If we make the connection ourselves, the estimated cost is payable in advance.
- If we agree to you making the connection, our costs for administration and approval of your proposal are payable in advance.
- An infrastructure charge, which contributes to the cost of providing sewerage systems. The maximum amount we can charge is fixed by our licence and is adjusted annually in line with the Retail Price Index. It's payable for each newly-connected premises.
- If a site was previously developed and there has been a sewer connection to the site within five years, there may be a credit applied to the infrastructure charges. These credits will be calculated based on the information provided on the 'Application for new connection estimate' form, available at southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection.

Further information concerning these costs and charges is available from our Customer Service centre. If we can't approve your proposals, estimated costs or any difference in our final costs, the matter can be referred to Ofwat for determination.

If you want to lay a drain or sewer in the public highway, you need to check you have the right to do so by contacting the Highway Authority.

4.8 New sewers

If your house is some distance from the nearest public sewer, you may want us to extend the sewerage system nearer to your house, particularly if you have neighbours who also want to connect their properties to main drainage. Whether you're the owner or the occupier of your house, you can ask us to provide a sewer for you.

However, you'll need to meet or underwrite the costs of a new sewer. This means you'll have to pay any difference between the income we receive from charges that relate to the sewer and our reasonable costs in providing the sewer. You may choose to pay a lump sum or pay by instalments over 12 years. We'll ask for a deposit, equal to the discounted aggregated deficit, before beginning the work. We pay interest on monies held for longer than three months, at a rate set by Ofwat.

For our part, we normally provide the sewer within six months of the request, however, this may be extended by agreement. If we can't meet this deadline, no extension has been agreed and you sustain loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If we can't agree the amount you should pay or the amount of security you should give, either of us can refer the matter to Ofwat. In some circumstances, your local council may be prepared to make the request on your behalf.

If you want more information on this complex subject, guidance notes and an application form are available at southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection, or call us on **0330 303 0119**.

4.9 First time sewerage schemes

Section 101A of the Water Industry Act gives us additional responsibilities for the provision of first-time sewerage, where there is an adverse effect on the environment. This applies to properties not already connected to the sewerage system. Initially you should contact Developer Services at southernwater.co.uk/developers-and-builders-contact-us or call us on **0330 303 0119**.

We'll be able to give you general information regarding this procedure and send the guidance notes and application forms to you. Under **section 98** of The Water Industry Act 1991 it's our duty to provide a public sewer for domestic purposes, if required to do so by certain people.

Where we provide a public sewer in response to an application under **section 98** or **section 101A**, we may also, under the provisions of **section 101B** and at the request of the person requiring the sewer, provide at the same time one or more lateral drains to connect to the sewer, to be used for drainage for domestic purposes. A lateral drain is the section of pipe connecting the house drainage from the boundary of the property to the public sewer.

If we provide the lateral drain, the person who requested it will be required to pay any costs incurred. We'll adopt laterals provided under this section.

4.10 Odour from works

Our treatment processes meet the Environment Agency quality standards, however, you may occasionally encounter problems with odours from our sites. Our monitoring devices will help us quickly detect odour issues, but we also rely on the public to call us on **0330 303 0368** if they smell the treatment works.

4.11 Pumping stations

From 1 October 2016, we became responsible for any eligible private sewer pumping stations.

In order for Southern Water to adopt a private sewer pumping station, it must:

- have been built before July 2011
- drain to a Southern Water sewer
- serve more than one property, each within a single curtilage. Or if only one property, the pumping station must be located outside of the property boundary.
- Not be part of a private treatment works, such as a cess pit or septic tank.

If you own a private sewer pumping station or know of one that fits the above criteria, please complete the online form at southernwater.co.uk/information-about-pumping-stations.

5 Our care for the environment

We're committed to looking after the environment. This is something our customers have told us they expect and value. We develop and deliver our Environment Policy with the aim of continually improving our environmental management system to improve our performance in line with customer expectations.

Our Executive Management Team is responsible for this policy.

Our employees share responsibility for environmental management and performance. We will:

- reflect the needs and views of our customers and stakeholders in developing and delivering this policy
- conform to our compliance obligations by meeting or exceeding the environmental requirements of legislation, regulation and our adopted standards
- prevent pollution, eliminate serious pollution incidents and contain the environmental impact of our activities
- provide sustainable and reliable water and wastewater services that minimise both nuisance and carbon emissions, taking into account the opportunities to mitigate and offset the impact of global climate change
- be a good and trusted neighbour, looking after the environment wherever we operate
- operate within a framework that supports and monitors sustainable development
- incorporate sustainable development principles to balance economic, environmental and social aspects in our business decisions
- continually improve our performance by maintaining and developing our Environmental Management System to the ISO 14001 standard
- develop indicators with measurable performance targets and report progress against these annually
- protect the environment by promoting the sustainable and efficient use and conservation of water, energy and natural resources
- promote the purchase and use of materials in a way that minimises potential environmental effects
- minimise waste, considering first prevention, then preparation for re-use, then recycling and, finally, recovery
- ensure we have the skills and knowledge to improve our environmental performance
- deliver assets that maintain sound environmental performance, protecting biodiversity and natural ecosystems during asset delivery
- learn from our successes and from incidents, sharing best practice with others
- work as one team with our customers, contractors, regulators, suppliers and with each other to achieve our vision.

6 Water efficiency plan and initiatives

6.1 Long-term plan

All water companies have water resource management plans, which look ahead 25 years and include current and projected future demands for water. These plans are regularly updated to account for factors such as projections of household numbers and occupancy rates and the implications of climate change. These plans, which complement the Environment Agency's strategies, are a statutory requirement under provisions in the Water Act 2003.

All water companies in England and Wales prepare and maintain water resource management and drought plans that set out how they'll continue to meet their duties to supply adequate quantities of wholesome water. Visit southernwater.co.uk/have-your-say to see our latest plans.

6.2 Efficient use of water

We have a detailed plan to promote the efficient use of water. This includes the installation of water meters for household properties, as detailed in **Section 7**.

As demand for water grows, so does the pressure on the environment, as we need to take more from underground sources and rivers or build more reservoirs. Water conservation is becoming an increasingly important aspect of our work.

Our plan to promote the careful use of water by customers is in four parts:

- Our work to conserve water – leading by example
- Information
- Education
- Practical assistance.

6.3 Our work to conserve water

Creating a culture of water-saving involves us playing our own part to show a partnership with customers. We are:

- launching a new internal engagement strategy, including a programme of water audits and retrofits for employees' homes to enable understanding of what we offer to our customers
- checking and reducing our own use of water through water-saving fixtures and fittings in washroom upgrades and the planning of a pilot rainwater harvesting scheme for a wastewater treatment site
- driving down leakage levels in our supply systems. We already have one of the lowest levels of leakage of all the water and sewerage companies. We intend to maintain this position and continue to reduce the amount of water lost from our distribution network
- carrying out household and commercial customer research to ensure we understand their needs and react accordingly.

6.4 Information

On our website at southernwater.co.uk/in-the-home are useful videos and tips for saving water at home. We've produced a booklet on the efficient use of water in the home garden, which is available free on request from the Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277**.

We were the first water company to promote the new European Water label, which makes it easier for customers to choose water-efficient products. Agreement was reached between the government, retailers, manufacturers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to introduce the label across all taps, showers, toilets and baths, which has meant customers are able to choose more efficient products, saving water, energy and money.

6.5 Education

We have a resource pack aimed specifically at primary schools, which combines the water efficiency messages with those of our fat, oil and grease (FOG) and 'Unflushables' campaigns. The pack aims to educate children and their parents about what should, and shouldn't, be put down toilets and drains. Our trained speakers also give talks to adult groups, such as Women's Institutes, gardening clubs and parish councils.

We work with schools in many different ways, directly and indirectly. Partners who help deliver water efficiency messages include WaterAid, football clubs and a touring theatre company. Our own colleagues deliver workshops and presentations regularly in schools and at other events, on request. Additionally, our Water Café attends family-friendly events during the summer months distributing water-saving devices and helpful tips.

Water efficiency school visits take place across the region, combining the physical fitting of water-saving products with activities and education materials teaching behaviour change. We'll be working closely with local authorities to ensure maximum savings are achieved.

6.6 Practical assistance

There are a number of important initiatives aimed at providing practical assistance for household customers to save water:

- If you spot or suspect a leak, call our service enquiries line on **0330 303 0368**.
- Our Developer Services team is available on **0330 303 0119** and will provide free advice for developers to promote water efficiency in the design and fitting of new properties.
- Since 2010 we've installed a water meter at most of the household properties in our water supply area unless it's not possible to do so.
- We continue to send 'Save-a-flush' bags to customers, on request, via our online form at southernwater.co.uk/save-a-flush-form.

7 Our metering programme

The Secretary of State has determined that our water supply area is seriously water-stressed. The Water Industry Act 1999 provides us with legal powers to install water meters for charging purposes.

Since 2010 we've been installing water meters on an area-by-area basis – under this programme, household properties are being metered for charging purposes. Meters fitted under our universal metering programme have been fitted free of charge.

Once a meter has been installed, there'll be no opportunity to change back to an unmetered basis of charge at any time in the future. All water use at the premises will be subject to metered charges.

In some situations, it's not practical to fit a meter owing to the supply configuration, and in these circumstances we provide an assessed metered charge. The assessed charge is a fixed charge based upon the number of bedrooms in your premises, or, where applicable, on a single-occupancy basis.

Once charges have been fixed on an assessed metered basis, we'll be happy to switch to metered where changes have been made to the supply pipe work configuration, allowing for the installation of a water meter.

8 Options when a meter can't be fitted

8.1 If we've been unable to fit a meter

If it's not possible to install a meter at your property you'll be given a number of options:

- You may make private arrangements for your pipework to be altered to enable us to install a meter. Unfortunately, due to the nature of some individual private supply arrangements, this option may not be available to every customer.
- If you live in a flat within a block and we're unable to meter your individual flat, we may be able to meter the block as a whole. For further information see **Section 8.2** below.
- We can provide an assessed metered charge, which is a fixed charge based upon the number of bedrooms in your premises, or, where applicable, on a single-occupancy basis.

8.2 Common supplies (flats)

Elements of shared water supplies exist in some blocks of flats or converted houses, for example:

- outside taps for communal garden watering
- standpipes in garage compounds
- communal header tanks in the attic of the building, feeding hot water systems, showers, toilets
- communal laundry facilities.

If, following our initial survey, we establish that this is the position for your property and it's not possible for you to sensibly make the necessary alterations to your private pipework, we'll be unable to install a meter to record the entire volume of water supplied to you.

However, it may be possible to meter the entire block of flats that you live in, provided that:

- we receive written acceptance from each bill-paying customer
- one person or entity such as a management or residents' association accepts responsibility for payment of the metered charge
- none of the occupiers is currently receiving water services accounts calculated on a metered basis by reference to recorded consumption.

8.3 Reverting to unmetered charges

Under the terms of our metering programme (see **Section 7**), once you've been switched to metered charges or an assessed charge, there'll be no opportunity to revert to the old rateable value basis of charge at any time in the future.

For further information, call our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277**.

9 Water meters – additional information

If you have a water meter, here are some points to remember.

9.1 Leakage and waste

If you have a meter, you'll be paying for water leaking from pipes and fittings for which you're responsible. You should ensure they are kept in good order and repair. Please see **Section 3.11** on leakage, which provides you with details of the safeguards in these circumstances. If you're able, it's in your interest to make frequent check readings of the meter to identify any excessive use and to enable early action to be taken. Advice on leak detection is available from the Customer Service centre and at southernwater.co.uk/leak-detection.

9.2 Testing the meter

All meters are tested before they're installed. If you question the accuracy of the meter we'll carry out an initial accuracy check free of charge. However, high consumption is normally more likely to indicate leakage or waste, rather than a faulty meter.

If you ask for another test and the meter is found to be within the prescribed limits then we'll ask you to pay a charge of £70 + VAT. The charge is payable before the test is carried out and will be refunded if the meter is found to exceed the prescribed limits.

9.3 Works affecting the meter

The meter remains our property. You need to contact our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277** to seek permission to do anything that may affect its operation or the accuracy of its measurement.

9.4 Interfering with the meter

If you interfere with the meter or carry out work that prevents it registering accurately, you'll be committing an offence and liable to a fine and a fee for putting it right. The regulations enable us to prosecute through the magistrates' court, where a fine of up to £1,000 may be imposed.

9.5 Change of occupation or ownership

You need to give us at least two working days' advance notice, excluding weekends and bank holidays, so that we can obtain a closing reading. If you fail to do so you'll continue to be responsible for metered charges at the property beyond the date you leave. In this situation your responsibility ends on the earliest of the following dates:

- a) 28 days after you tell us of your move.
- b) The next routine meter reading date.
- c) The day we're notified of details of the new occupier.

For further information, including requests for meter testing, contact the Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277**.

10 Payment of charges

10.1 Charges

The water industry goes through a thorough price review process every five years, which is led by the industry regulator Ofwat. The new price review period runs from April 2015 to March 2020 and water companies like us are subject to a new set of price controls that have been put in place by Ofwat. This requires water companies to undertake a review of their charges and charging structures.

We're managing a substantial capital investment programme for the period 2015–20. Over the five years, we will be spending around £3 billion to deliver a range of improvements for customers across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. In the same period, average bills will fall by a total of 8% before adjustments are made each year for inflation.

As well as covering the day-to-day running costs of supplying clean drinking water and taking away and treating wastewater, the investment programme will include:

- new schemes to replace water mains, protect water supplies, reduce leakage and improve water quality.
- a programme to replace sewers, schemes to help prevent flooding, the enhancement of wastewater treatment and ensuring there are more beaches with 'Excellent' bathing water quality.
- the delivery of improved customer services.

Details of our charges and charging policies are found in our charges guides which are available free from the Customer Service centre or at: southernwater.co.uk/our-charges. We have standard tariffs for the services we provide in respect of unmetered and metered water supplies and wastewater collection and disposal.

VAT is payable only on certain charges and this is detailed on bills, where appropriate.

As a household customer, your water services charges are calculated either on an unmetered basis, by reference to either your property's rateable value, or an assessed rate or on a metered basis, by reference to the volume of water supplied as recorded by a water meter.

Normally, the occupier of the premises receiving our services is liable to pay our charges. This applies even if the occupier is a tenant and the tenancy agreement says the landlord will pay our charges. The landlord will only be liable if he agrees this with us directly or pays the bills in his name.

Many landlords find it convenient to use the Landlord TAP facility at landlordtap.com. This is an easy-to-use website that enables all landlords and managing agents of properties in England and Wales to provide water companies with details of those responsible for the payment of water and/or wastewater charges.

It's in your interest to ensure we are notified of changes in occupier. This is particularly important if you've a water meter, as the Water Industry Act 1991 states that you're required to give us at least two working days' advance notice, excluding weekends and bank holidays, before you leave your premises so we can obtain a closing reading. If you don't and are unable to provide a final meter reading, you may be held liable for charges beyond the date that you exit the property. See **Section 9.5**.

On receipt of your final account, we'll refund any outstanding credit balance within 10 working days of your request or transfer it to your new property, if it's in our area.

10.2 If you're a tenant

The person primarily responsible for payment of water service charges is the occupier of the property. Unless your landlord has entered into a written agreement with us accepting responsibility for our charges, this means you, as the tenant, must pay the bills.

We're not party to the terms of your tenancy agreement. If you believe water services charges are included in your rent but we've written to you asking for payment, you'll need to ask your landlord to contact us and make payment. However, in the event that your landlord does not pay, we'll have to ask you to pay.

If the bill you've received is for a previous tenant, please contact us so we can send you a correct bill.

If you experience a leak on your supply pipe and live in a property where your landlord is a management company, housing association or is council owned, it may be your landlord's responsibility to carry out any repairs. Please contact them immediately if you suspect a problem. Please also let us know, as we may be able to help you with the bill. See **Section 3.12.6**.

Landlord TAP

If you're a Landlord, you may find it convenient to use landlordtap.com, an easy-to-use website that enables all landlords and managing agents of properties in England and Wales to provide water companies with details of those responsible for the payment of water and/or wastewater charges.

10.3 How charges are calculated

Some households receive unmetered services. Services are supplied on a metered basis if:

- a meter has been installed as part of our metering programme
- you've chosen to have a meter installed
- a meter was already installed
- you've made a new connection to our water main
- you wish to use a sprinkler or unattended watering device and haven't yet received a meter under our Metering Programme
- you've a swimming pool/recreational pool and haven't yet received a meter under our Metering Programme.

To apply for a meter:

- call **0330 303 1262** or visit southernwater.co.uk/apply-for-meter

10.4 Unmetered accounts

Historically, water charges have been predominantly unmetered and calculated based on the rateable value of the property.

Rateable values haven't been assessed by the Valuation Office since 1990, and all new properties have had water meters fitted since then. While water companies are permitted to continue using this outdated method of charging, increasingly in the South East of England, water companies are switching their customers over to metered charging.

Assessed charges

Since 2010, we've introduced a programme to fit water meters at household properties in our water supply area. Where metering is not possible because of the configuration of the private pipework, our fixed rate assessed tariff is employed as the method of charge. This charge is based on the number of bedrooms in the customer's home, which is used as a proxy for occupancy.

Using assumptions about typical per capita water consumption for metered customers, assessed charges are set by applying our metered tariff to the total assessed consumption at the property. A single occupier discount is also available on this tariff.

A relatively small number of our customers receive charges based on rateable value. The circumstances are:

- customers that live in an area where the water supply is provided by another water company and that company hasn't yet decided to fit water meters.
- the property is in our water supply area and hasn't yet been switched to a metered water supply or an assessed charge.

For rateable value based charges, we make separate charges for water supply services and for wastewater services, if we provide them. In both cases charges will comprise:

- a standing charge, which is set to recover the costs of servicing each account, for example, the costs of meter reading, billing, cash collection, debt recovery and enquiry handling
- a charge calculated on the rateable value of the premises as at 31 March 1990 (subject to a minimum charge).

If your property doesn't have a rateable value and we're unable to fit a water meter, we'll apply an assessed metered charge based on the number of bedrooms in your premises, or on single occupancy, not direct usage.

If your property is connected to a public sewer for the drainage of surface water only, you'll also have to pay a fixed charge for the surface water drainage.

Where water is used for any other purpose specified by us (garages, pools or troughs), we'll fix a charge for that purpose.

10.5 Metered accounts

We make separate charges for water supply services and for wastewater services, if we provide them. In both cases our charges will comprise:

- a standing charge which is set to recover the costs of servicing each account, for example the costs of meter reading, billing, cash collection, debt recovery and enquiry handling
- a charge based on the volume of water supplied as recorded by the meter.

Your charges for water supply services will be calculated on the amount of water supplied as recorded on the meter. If the meter is not operating properly or we're unable to read it for some reason, we'll make a reasonable estimate of the amount supplied and calculate your charges on this. If you disagree with the estimate, we'll review any information you can provide about water usage and discuss this with you.

Your charges for wastewater services will be assessed on the amount of clean water supplied, with a fixed reduction of 7.5% for water that hasn't gone to the sewer (for example, outside water use).

10.6 Surface water rebate

Our full sewerage standing charge is made up of different elements. These are waste (foul) water, surface water and highway drainage.

For the majority of our customers, the rain that falls on to roofs, paths and driveways enters the public sewer and is treated by us. If surface water doesn't drain from your property into the

sewerage system but into soakaways – a private surface water drain or sewer that doesn't enter the public sewerage system – then you're entitled to a rebate.

To request a rebate please call our 24-hour message line on **0330 303 1266** or complete and submit our online form at southernwater.co.uk/surface-water-rebate-form (see **Note 2.**)

The highway drainage element covers the cost of highway water run-off. It's payable by all customers who benefit from a connection to the public sewerage system.

Note 2: Rebates will be backdated to 1 April 2015.

10.7 Payment of water and sewerage service charges

We know there are many demands on household budgets. Organising your budget and finding money to pay bills can sometimes be difficult. However, water and wastewater bills must be paid.

Customer care is a top priority for us and **Section 11** informs you how we can help if you're experiencing difficulties. This section also explains what steps we can take to collect our charges if you don't pay or we're unable to agree a satisfactory payment arrangement with you. However, we'll always try to be flexible in our approach and are committed to doing everything possible to reach an agreement which you'll be happy with.

Don't pay more than you have to

If you don't pay your charges when they're due or we cannot come to a satisfactory payment arrangement with you, the whole amount becomes due. As a last resort we may end up employing the services of an external debt collection agency or taking you to court. This will involve you paying extra costs because you'll also have to pay an administration fee or court fees and our solicitor's costs. We prefer to avoid this option but, like all businesses, we need our customers to pay for the services they receive.

10.8 Paying unmetered accounts

Our charges are calculated for the year from 1 April and are payable on that date. However, payment can be made by:

- two instalments, on 1 April and 1 October, which may be paid by Direct Debit
- prior arrangement in 12 monthly instalments through the year. This option is available to all household customers, on request.

If any instalment is not paid by the date due, we can ask for the charges to be paid in full. We'll only withdraw instalment arrangements as a last resort and, therefore, urge you to contact us immediately.

10.9 Paying metered accounts

We will aim to read your meter every year and issue a bill based on this reading. Where we can't take a reading, the bill will be based on an estimation of consumption or you may provide a customer reading.

You'll receive your bill shortly afterwards and it's then due for payment. Alternatively, you can make monthly budget plan payments.

10.10 Payment options

As detailed on the back of our bills, you can pay your bill using a variety of methods. We offer a range of payment intervals including weekly, fortnightly, monthly, as well as annual and half-yearly options for unmetered charges (see **Note 3**, below). You can pay in the following ways:

- **Your Account** – manage your water account online at southernwater.co.uk/your-account. You can set up a Direct Debit or payment card with just a few clicks. Alternatively, you can pay by debit/credit card.
- **By Direct Debit** – this is the simplest and most convenient method. You can apply online, we can take your details over the phone or send you a form to complete. It's safe, easy to arrange and it offers a choice of payment dates.
- **By debit or credit card** – we're able to accept payment by credit or debit card over the phone on **0330 303 0277**. You can also use our 24-hour automated service on **0330 303 1263**.
- **By cash or cheque payment at the bank** – no extra fee is charged if you pay at any Post Office or branch of HSBC. If you pay at any other bank, you may be charged a small fee for each payment.
- **By post** – complete and tear off the payment slip on your bill and send it with your cheque to: Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.
- **At any Post Office** – fill in the payment slip and take it, with your payment card, to any Post Office where you can pay free of charge.
- **PayPoint** – for customers who prefer to pay at a local facility, there are PayPoint collection terminals, in newsagents, convenience stores, supermarkets, garages and off-licences. You'll need to take your payment card or your bill to the local PayPoint outlet with the cash to make a payment. You'll receive a receipt for the payment, which must be retained as proof of payment.
- **Phone banking** – please quote the 13 digits of your payment reference without any spaces. Our bank sort code is 40-02-50 and, if requested, our bank account number is 91426907.
- **By payment card** – this can be used free of charge at any Post Office or PayPoint outlets in local shops for weekly, fortnightly or monthly payments.
- **By standing order** – this is similar to Direct Debit except that you have to tell your bank every time any change needs to be made to the payment amount. Please ensure you quote your payment reference as indicated on your bill (it should be 13 digits without any spaces). Our bank sort code is 40-02-50 and our bank account number is 91426907.

Note 3: All methods of payments are free of charge unless specified.

10.11 If you don't keep to the agreement or pay the bill

If you don't pay your bill or keep to a payment arrangement we've agreed with you, we'll take the following actions:

Stage 1

We'll send you a payment reminder giving you a minimum of 10 days to pay the outstanding amount.

Alternatively, if you don't make payments in accordance with an agreed instalment arrangement, a withdrawal of instalments warning letter will be sent to you requesting that any unpaid instalments are paid within seven days. If we don't receive the outstanding payments, we'll cancel the instalment plan and the total outstanding balance will then be due in full.

Stage 2

If you don't pay or contact us to agree a payment arrangement, we'll send you a notification of intention to file a default, which is a record of non-payment, on your consumer credit file. The notice will explain that if you fail to pay the amount owing to us within 32 days of receipt, we'll be entitled to register a default against your consumer credit file with credit reference agencies. This is likely to make it more difficult for you to obtain credit in the future and the default of the payment could stay on your credit file for six years.

If you contact us within 28 days of receipt of the notice and enter into an agreed repayment plan, including our receipt of the first payment, the default will not be registered. However, the repayment plan must be maintained to avoid the risk of a default being registered at a later date. Any payment made will be posted against the oldest outstanding balance.

If there's an unresolved dispute on your account or if you have an agreed payment plan that's up to date, we won't register a default on your credit file.

If you're experiencing financial problems we can help, and details of our financial assistance schemes are provided with the notice of intention to file a default.

There'll only be one default filed against a customer at any one time for any one property. Where a default has already been registered, any further debt will be posted against this existing default. If you have a complaint regarding the registration of the default and, following investigation, it's appropriate for the default to be removed, we'll send you a compensation payment as outlined in **Section 14.5**.

You may also wish to contact credit reference agency Experian about an incorrect registration of a default and it may also provide a compensation payment if any loss has been incurred from its incorrect action. Experian may be contacted by:

- writing to: Consumer Help Service, PO Box 8000, Nottingham NG80 7WF
- Calling **0344 481 0800** or **0844 4818000**
- Visiting [experian.co.uk](https://www.experian.co.uk).

Stage 3

If you still don't pay or contact us, we may take either of the following actions:

a) Ask an independent debt collection agency to recover the amount owing. This may result in additional charges being added to your account. You'll be advised if we choose to take this action. All the companies we use are members of the Credit Services Association and operate under the association's strict code of practice on debt collection. Copies of this code are available from the Credit Services Association on 0191 286 5656.

If, when being referred to an external debt collection agency, you are successfully assessed for one of our financial assistance schemes, any additional charges will be removed. Details of all schemes and help can be found in **Section 11** 'Customers who need financial assistance'.

If your account is referred to an external company and you've any complaint concerning them that you're unable to resolve directly, we'll investigate your complaint and, if appropriate, remove your account from their files.

b) We may send you a 'Letter Before Legal Action', which explains the action we'll take if payment or contact is not received within 14 days.

In the event of financial difficulties, full details of how to contact us or debt advice agencies are provided on the back of the letter.

If at this stage, you fail to pay or contact us, we may issue a county court claim to recover our charges. You'll have to pay the fee for the issue of the claim and our solicitor's costs. If you don't respond, the court may issue a judgment order for payment of the full amount due to us. If you still don't pay, we may take further legal action to enforce the judgment order, which may include:

i) Issuing a warrant or writ to instruct the bailiff or High Court enforcement officer to seize your belongings and sell them at auction.

ii) Use of the High Court enforcement officers will incur substantial further costs, which you will have to pay in addition to the judgment debt. These fees, approved by Parliament, are set out in the High Court enforcement officer's regulations amendment 2014 and can be viewed at: legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/1/schedule/made. Alternatively a hard copy of this information can be provided by contacting us on 0330 303 1261.

iii) You may be served with an 'Order to Attend' notice, which will require you to attend your local court in person to give evidence, under oath, of your financial circumstances.

iv) Asking the court to place a charge against your property if you own your home. This means if you sell or re-mortgage your home, the money you owe us will have to be paid. As a last resort, to recover the debt if you don't agree to a repayment plan, we may apply to the court to order the sale of the property.

v) Applying to the court to take a deduction from your income. The court will contact your employer to deduct the money direct from your earnings.

vi) We may apply to the court for a third party debt order that will require your bank or building society to pay the debt direct from your accounts.

vii) Commencing insolvency proceedings against you represents our last resort.

Remember, a county court judgment will have an impact on your credit rating and may prevent you from purchasing goods on credit or obtaining a mortgage or other loan for a significant period of time. Substantial costs may be added to your bill if you don't respond or keep up repayments on judgment debts.

If South East Water bills you for wastewater on our behalf, you'll be subject to the debt recovery procedures set out in South East Water's code of practice (available online at corporate.southeastwater.co.uk/news-media/publications/customer-leaflets-and-codes-of-practice).

10.12 Privacy

If you contact us at any stage, we'll try to agree a payment arrangement with you to avoid any further action. We may exchange data with relevant credit reference and fraud prevention agencies. Some processes may be automated. A condensed guide to the use of your personal information by us, and the credit reference and fraud prevention agencies, is sent out with each customer's bill.

We operate a privacy policy which can be viewed in full at southernwater.co.uk/privacy and explains how we may use information supplied or collected from you, or via other sources. For further information, it also links to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website. You may also want to visit the following ICO guidance document 'Credit Explained' at ico.org.uk/media/for-the-public/.../1282/credit-explained-dp-guidance.pdf.

10.13 If you dispute the bill

If you don't believe that you're responsible for paying the bill, or you disagree with the amount, you must tell us straight away. Call us on 0330 303 0277 for help and advice.

No further action will be taken while we look into the matter. We may need to ask you to provide further details to support your dispute. If we don't agree with you, we'll tell you why and require you to either have to pay the charges in full or agree a payment plan with us.

If you're not happy with our decision, there's an established complaint procedure that may involve an investigation by a senior manager or director. Your complaint can be referred to the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) – see 'Independent Assessment' (**Section 13.7**). Please let us know if you have contacted CcWater so we can make sure we don't take further recovery action while you receive advice from them.

Our leaflet detailing our complaint procedure is available to download at southernwater.co.uk/complaints-procedure or call or write to us for a copy – see **Section 13**.

11 Customers who need financial assistance

11.1 How to get help if you can't pay your bill in full

We understand that some of our customers face genuine financial difficulties. Although water services have to be paid for, we always try to be flexible in our approach and are committed to doing everything possible to reach a resolution. If you have difficulties paying, contact us as soon as you can:

Call us

0800 027 0363 – Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Calls using this number will be free of charge from a BT landline. Charges may apply from other service providers and mobiles.

Send us a message

By completing our online form at assistance.southernwater.co.uk.

Write to us

Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.

It's vital to talk to us if you're having difficulties paying your bill. We know this can be a hard conversation to have, but our specialist advisers can help you find a solution that suits your situation, possibly breaking your payments down into more manageable amounts. Your case will be handled in complete confidence and our adviser will look to place you on the most suitable payment scheme or tariff, based on your circumstances.

11.2 What we'll do to help

We'll discuss your circumstances and reach an agreement with you to pay your bill within a reasonable time limit, in amounts you can afford. We offer a range of options and weekly, fortnightly or monthly payment plans.

If you don't already have a meter installed and you live in a property with a high rateable value, we can discuss whether changing to a metered supply could reduce your future bills. You can contact the Customer Service centre on **0330 303 1262** for further information. A detailed information leaflet can also be provided.

If you already have a meter, we can discuss water-saving measures with you. We have a number of helpful leaflets available, together with a Leakage Code of Practice. You can request these from our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277**. In certain cases, you may also be eligible for help under the WaterSure or Essentials Tariff – see below.

Help us to help you by calling **0800 027 0363** between 8am and 7pm Monday to Friday or between 9am and 1pm Saturday.

11.3 WaterSure tariff

If you have a water meter and consistently use a large amount of water, for example due to a medical condition, you may be entitled to a reduction on your bill, if you satisfy the following government criteria.

Firstly, you or another member of your household must be receiving one of the following benefits/credits:

- Child Tax Credit (but not if you receive only the family element).
- Working Families Tax Credit.
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Housing Benefit.
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Income Support.
- Pension Credit.
- Universal Credit.

Secondly, either you, your child or another member of your household, suffers from a medical condition that requires significant additional use of water. Alternatively, you must have responsibility and be receiving child benefit for three or more children under 19 in full-time education.

Call us on **0800 027 0363** to talk to a specialist adviser if you think you're eligible. Further details can be found in our Household Charges Scheme leaflet available on request. Or complete an application online at southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill.

11.4 Essentials tariff

For customers who receive their water supply from us

If you receive both water supply and sewerage services from us, you'll qualify for our Essentials tariff if your annual water services charges represent at least 3% of the total income for your household, after deducting council tax and housing costs.

If you receive only water supply services from us, you'll qualify for our Essentials tariff if your annual water supply charges represent at least 1.1% of the total income for your household, after deducting council tax and housing costs.

For customers who receive their water supply from another company

If you receive your water supply from another company and your wastewater services from us, and you've been accepted on to the financial assistance tariff provided by your water supply company, you'll automatically qualify for our Essentials tariff. Your water supply company will notify us if it accepts you on to its financial assistance tariff.

If your water company doesn't have a financial assistance tariff or you don't qualify for your water company's financial assistance tariff, you may still qualify for our Essentials tariff. In either case,

you'll qualify if your wastewater charges represent at least 1.9% of the total income for your household, after deducting council tax and housing costs.

For households where occupants in the household are in receipt of Pension Credit

If members of your household receive Pension Credit, you'll automatically qualify for our Essentials tariff.

How to apply

Call us on **0800 027 0363** or complete our financial assistance form at assistance.southernwater.co.uk. To help us find out if you qualify for the tariff, you need to provide us with information about your household income, housing costs and the number of people living in your home.

How we can help you

Once we've found out if you qualify for assistance under our Essentials tariff, we'll provide you with a discount on the charges we make to you.

If we supply you with water, the amount will be based on how much of your household income you are spending on our charges. We call this your 'bill-to-income ratio'.

If your water is supplied by another company, and we only provide you with wastewater services, we'll provide you with a 25% discount on your wastewater charges.

Assistance with your charges will start from the date you applied for our Essentials tariff and will remain in place for 12 months. We'll then review your circumstances to decide if the Essentials tariff should continue for another 12 months and a renewal notice will be sent to you, which you'll need to sign and send back to us.

11.5 Our New Start scheme

To help customers in severe financial difficulty, we operate our New Start Scheme. If you have arrears of £500 or haven't made a payment within two financial years, you may qualify, provided you start and maintain regular instalment payments.

To be considered for this scheme, we need to carry out a full income and expenditure analysis with you. For further details, call us on: **0800 027 0363** or visit: southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill or assistance.southernwater.co.uk to complete an application.

South East Water (SEW) customers

If you were accepted to our New Start scheme prior to us moving you across to SEW, your payments will continue to be matched and will be monitored by SEW. Any disputes or issues should be raised with SEW directly.

11.6 Water Direct scheme

If you owe us money and are receiving Income Support, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Pension Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions may agree to Water Direct payments being deducted from your benefit and paid directly to us to cover your water bill.

Contact us on **0800 027 0363** or email payless@southernwater.co.uk and explain your circumstances to our trained staff. They'll take your details and make an application on your behalf. Alternatively visit: southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill to complete and submit the relevant application form. You may also wish to contact your local Department for Work and Pensions office directly.

Paying this way means you:

- pay in a convenient way at no extra cost
- won't have to remember to make payments.

If you're in any doubt, get in touch with the Department for Work and Pensions, in the first instance, to see if you might be eligible to claim any benefit(s). It won't be able to offer you financial assistance, but may be able to provide support in other ways.

11.7 What else you can do

If you're worried about household bills in general, it may help to get in touch with an independent advice agency, such as:

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice is an independent charity, which provides free, confidential and impartial advice on a wide range of problems. Expert advisers can help you with your debts and are able to negotiate repayment plans with your creditors. If you have other problems, such as illness, redundancy or divorce, the adviser may be able to help or tell you where you can get further advice. To find your nearest Citizens Advice visit citizensadvice.org.uk.

Step Change

Step Change help people to manage their debts, offering tailored advice and practical solutions. The advice they provide is effective, confidential and free. For further details, call: **0800 138 1111** or visit stepchange.org

National Debt line

National Debt line is a helpline for people with debt problems. The service is free, confidential and independent and advisers can assist with drawing up a personal budget and negotiating with creditors. For further details call: **0808 808 4000** or visit nationaldebtline.co.uk.

Other assistance

Some Money Advice Centres, which can be found in your local phone book, provide a similar free debt counselling service. You can also get in touch with the Department for Work and Pensions to see if you might be eligible to claim any benefit(s). It won't be able to give you financial assistance, but may be able to provide support in other ways.

If you've already contacted other organisations and they're advising you, please let us know. We can put the debt recovery process on hold for 30 days, with the possibility of a further extension of 30 days, once you have contacted a recognised agency.

12 Priority Services

12.1 Priority Services Register

You're entitled to expect high standards of service from us. We always try to give all our customers the best of care. However, we know that some of our customers, for example the elderly or disabled, may have extra needs and concerns.

To help us provide everyone with the best possible service, we keep a confidential register of customers who have individual needs. The register means our employees know about any special circumstances. We also provide the following services free of charge:

- Information in large print or Braille
- Talking bills
- Audio tapes/CDs: letters, leaflets or bills can be converted into this format
- The option to send bills to friends or carers
- Frequent water meter-reading service
- Special phone service for people who use 'text' phones or 'typetalk'
- A priority service for people who use a kidney dialysis machine at home and those with disabilities
- Advice on water efficiency and special water appliances in your home
- Password scheme.

To join our Priority Services Register, contact us:

By phone

0800 027 0800, Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm.

Calls from BT landlines are free but charges from mobiles or other service providers may vary.

By Minicom text telephone

0330 303 1265, (service for the deaf and hard of hearing) – Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

By fax

On **0203 0479147**.

Online

[southernwater.co.uk/services-we-offer](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/services-we-offer)

By writing to us

Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.

13 If you have a complaint

We always aim to provide excellent service, but sometimes we get things wrong. When we do, we need to know so that we can put things right. In the first instance call us on **0330 303 0223** so we can put things right or alternatively follow our complaints procedure. Our procedure for dealing with complaints has been approved by our regulator, Ofwat and CCWater.

If your complaint is regarding a billing issue, we'll ensure no recovery action is taken while we investigate. There may also be occasions, particularly with operational complaints, where we may need further information. Where possible, we'll try to resolve your complaint by calling you to discuss the matter. We'll always offer to follow this up in writing and to send you a complaints procedure leaflet in the post. Where we cannot reach you to discuss the matter, we'll write to you within 10 working days, if we don't you're entitled to a penalty payment.

13.1 Customer information

Information on how to contact us is sent out with our bills, including the address, email and phone number of our Customer Service centre. See **Section 2.2**.

We also have a complaints procedure leaflet, which explains the process taken by our teams in full. This can also be viewed at: southernwater.co.uk/complaints-procedure. Alternatively, you can call: **0330 303 0223** and request a copy. The contact details for CCWater are also included on this leaflet.

13.2 Complaints and timescales

All complaints, whether received in writing, by email, phone or personal contact are logged at time of receipt and provided with an individual monitoring control record.

Our system ensures that we record:

- your name and address
- the nature of your complaint
- the date your complaint was sent to us
- the date we received it
- the latest date by which we may respond
- the person who received the complaint
- the person who is handling the complaint
- the type of response required
- the mechanism for ensuring the complaint is recorded as completed.

Written complaints are monitored to ensure they're handled within the timescales required under the Guaranteed Standards Scheme, or sooner. These are fully described in **Section 14**.

13.3 What we'll do to put things right

We aim to provide high-quality, efficient and helpful services. However, we may make a mistake. If we do, we'll explain to you what went wrong, put things right and apologise. We'll review each case individually and provide appropriate compensation in a professional and timely manner.

13.4 If you have a complaint

If you have a complaint about your water bill, water supply or the sewers, the quickest way to resolve it is to call us on **0330 303 0223**.

If you'd prefer, you can write to the Customer Relations Manager: Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.

13.5 A fresh look

If you've written to us and don't agree with our response, you can talk to a manager who'll review your case with you. To arrange this, please call **0330 303 0118**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Ultimately, if we're unable to resolve the issue, you can contact the Consumer Council for Water. See **Section 13.7**.

13.6 Independent assessment

If you've followed our complaints process but are still unhappy, the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) offers free independent advice. Visit ccwater.org.uk, call **0300 034 2222** or write to: Consumer Council for Water c/o 1st Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B2 4AJ

CCWater will investigate your complaint and the way we've dealt with it. Please make sure you've followed our complaints process first, otherwise CCWater will pass the complaint back to us.

13.7 Unresolved complaints

In the event that your complaint remains unresolved after CCWater's review or investigation, CCWater will provide you with details of how to apply to WATRS for a final independent adjudication on your complaint. Information about the scheme can be obtained at watrs.org. Alternatively, you can write to: WATRS, International Dispute Resolution Centre, 70 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1EU

You can't apply to WATRS until after CCWater have issued a deadlock letter.

13.8 Arbitration

Details of disputes that can be referred to arbitration are given in **Section 16**.

14 The Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS)

14.1 Our guarantee to customers

This customer charter emphasises our commitment to our household customers. It details the minimum standards of service you can expect in our main areas of business – and the compensation payments we'll make if we fall short of these standards.

To view these standards visit southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service.

GSS payments will be made in accordance with Ofwat Guidance, which can be found at: ofwat.gov.uk/households/supply-and-standards/standards-of-service/.

14.2 Disputes

If we're unable to agree your entitlement to a payment or credit, you can refer the matter to: The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA. It may call for all relevant information and will then determine the dispute.

Your legal rights

A claim of payment or credit under this scheme doesn't affect any other legal right to compensation you may have and doesn't form an admission on our part as to liability in the event of any legal or other proceedings taking place.

15 Customer Charter payments

This section outlines compensation payments we'll make in addition to the minimum standards set out by the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) to emphasise our commitment to our household customers. It details the minimum standards of service you can expect in our main areas of business – and the compensation payments we'll make if we fall short of these standards.

15.1 Water supply

Meter relocation

For elderly customers and those with individual needs who are having difficulty reading their meter and would like it relocated, we'll carry out a free survey. If it's possible to move the meter we'll move it free of charge. If we're unable to move it, we'll let you know why.

For customers who are unable to read their meter themselves or want to monitor their consumption, we can provide a regular meter read service, four times a year.

15.2 Water quality

We act immediately if we discover quality problems in your water supply. If you complain about our water making you ill, we'll contact you within two hours of receiving the complaint to arrange for the water at your tap to be tested.

However, if your complaint relates to another water quality matter, we'll contact you within one working day and arrange a visit, if required.

After sampling at your premises we'll call you with the results for basic quality tests within two working days, if you've given us a contact number. For those occasions where, due to regulatory requirements, we need to carry out a more complex analysis, we'll confirm our findings in writing within 10 working days.

If we fail to meet these timescales we'll credit your account with £25.

Discolouration

Very occasionally you may find that your water supply is a brownish colour. This discolouration is often caused by work being carried out on ageing iron mains and, although unsightly, poses no health risk.

If laundry is stained because of water discolouration due to our mains, we'll compensate you for the cost of the affected items. If other damage is caused eg damage to your boiler, we'll arrange for a plumber to visit your property and to pay you the appropriate compensation.

Replacement of lead pipes

We have a policy of replacing company lead pipes and encourage our customers to replace any lead water pipes that they own (see **Note 1, Section 3.13**).

Customers are responsible for the pipe that runs between the boundary of the street and their property – this is referred to as the supply pipe. We're responsible for that part of the pipe between the water main and the boundary of the street in which the water main is laid – this is referred to as the communication pipe. If you are replacing your lead supply pipe, we'll replace our communication pipe at the same time, free of charge, provided you give us 15 working days' notice. If we fail to do so we'll credit your water services account with £25.

15.3 Customer services

Incorrectly issued county court claims

If we incorrectly issue a county court claim against you for a debt that you're not liable for and for which you've previously informed us that you're not liable, we'll correct the situation, withdraw the fees and costs and credit your water services account with £150.

Debt collection

In some circumstances, we refer customers' debts to debt collection agencies. The agencies we use are registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and are members of the Credit Services Association and subject to its code of practice. We also audit these companies' policies and procedures on an annual basis. In the unlikely event that a debt is pursued this way in error or the debt collection agent acts improperly, we'll credit your water services account with £25.

Registration of a default against the customer credit file

In some circumstances we register a default against a customer's credit files held by Credit Reference Agencies. In the unlikely event that a debt is registered in error, we'll correct the situation and credit your water account with £25.

15.4 Access to property

Where we're carrying out works and need access to your property, we'll agree the timing and any specific access requirements in advance. Failure to consult will result in a £25 credit to your account in respect of each affected property.

15.5 Additional standards

In addition to the Guaranteed Standards Scheme, we also make the following provisions for imposing water restriction.

We'll do our best to safeguard your water supply and try to avoid having to impose water restrictions or the use of standpipes in times of drought. Unfortunately, in exceptional circumstances it may be impossible to avoid such restrictions.

If your supply of water for essential domestic purposes is interrupted, or cut off as a result of an emergency restriction authorised by a drought order (other than through exceptional drought circumstances, which couldn't have been avoided), we'll credit your water services account with £10 per day, subject to a maximum of our average water bill for the previous year.

Ofwat will make the final decision on any dispute on this issue.

Temporary Use Bans

Commonly referred to as TUBs, these are powers granted to water companies to impose restrictions on customers' water use. Previously these were referred to as hosepipe bans in the Water Industry Act 1991, but they were modified in 2010 under the Flood and Water Management Act to cover a wider range of restrictions.

The circumstances in which water companies may exercise these powers are not expressly linked to drought.

Before imposing a temporary hosepipe ban, a water company has to be satisfied that there is a serious shortage of water available for distribution (or is threatened). With drought orders and drought permits we also need to make sure that the actual or threatened water shortage is because of an exceptional shortage of rain.

TUBs may be imposed by water companies under their own powers in Section 76 (2) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended by section 36 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and The Water Use (Temporary Bans) Order 2010) and do not require the prior approval of the Secretary of State/National Assembly for Wales or the Environment Agency.

The scope of the powers water companies may exercise under this section is limited to prohibiting the following uses of water:

- Watering a garden using a hosepipe

- Cleaning a private motor-vehicle using a hosepipe
- Watering plants on household or other non-household premises using a hosepipe
- Cleaning a private leisure boat using a hosepipe
- Filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool
- Drawing water, using a hosepipe, for domestic recreational use
- Filling or maintaining a domestic pond using a hosepipe
- Filling or maintaining an ornamental fountain
- Cleaning walls, or windows, of household premises using a hosepipe
- Cleaning paths or patios using a hosepipe
- Cleaning other artificial outdoor surfaces using a hosepipe.

TUBs only apply to water taken from the mains supply.

In a worsening drought, simple supply and demand management measures are not always enough and water companies may have to take additional steps by applying to the Environment Agency for a Drought Permit or to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/National Assembly for Wales for a Drought Order.

Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Environment Agency provide a booklet about the process for obtaining drought orders and drought permits at gov.uk/government/collections/apply-for-a-drought-permit-drought-order-or-emergency-drought-order.

Drought orders and permits provide a temporary mechanism for managing water resources limited by an exceptional shortage of rain. They're a water resources management tool and exist to help avoid risk to public water supplies while providing the best possible protection for the environment.

16 Arbitration

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, some disputes between customers and Southern Water may be decided by an arbitrator, to be agreed between the two parties.

In some cases the costs of the arbitration may be payable by whichever party is unsuccessful in the dispute. Disputes that can be referred to arbitration are:

Water meters

Any dispute around our powers to carry out the installation of a water meter, compensation or the distribution of expenses.

Compensation arising from street works

Any dispute around possible compensation due following work we've carried out in your street.

Unresolved complaints

See **Section 13.8**.

17 Disputes determined by our regulator, Ofwat

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, some disputes between customers and us can be referred by either of us to Ofwat for determination. These are:

New connections to water mains and associated works

Whether or not:

- any security for the expenses we expect to incur was reasonably required
- our expenses were incurred reasonably
- conditions relating to separate supplies and metering are reasonable.

The requirement for your property to have a separate supply pipe

- Whether our requirement for your property to have a single supply service pipe is reasonable.

The terms and conditions of metering

- Any dispute around the terms and conditions we apply to connect your supply to the mains, allowing us to install a water meter – and we can't agree on the appointment of an arbitrator.
- Any dispute around whether it's possible or practical to fix charges in relation to the volume of water supplied, or where the company would incur unreasonable expense.

Requirement to maintain pressure and supply

- Any dispute around our requirement for your water tank to be adequate capacity before we connect your water supply.

Adoption of sewers or sewage disposal works

- An appeal against our proposal (or refusal) to adopt a sewer or works, or about the conditions for adoption.

Connecting private sewers and drains to public sewers

- Any question about whether our refusal to allow a connection, or our requirement to inspect your drain or sewer before allowing connection is reasonable – or about the costs and security we require you to pay.
- Whether the cost estimate for our works or the requirement of security is reasonable.

Power to alter a private drainage system

- Where we intend to close your private drainage system, an appeal about the position or sufficiency of the replacement drain or sewer.

Power to close or restrict the use of a public sewer

- Any dispute around the effectiveness of an alternative sewer provided to replace an one that's due to be closed.

Terms and conditions for the adoption of water mains – self lay

- Before work commences, any dispute about the terms and conditions to agree adoption of mains laid by a contractor.
- On completion of works, any dispute around financial arrangements, eg build rate/income assessment.

Terms and conditions for requisitioned water mains, sewers or lateral drains

- Any dispute around the financial terms for providing mains, sewers or lateral drains – or the timescale or route proposed for doing this.

Request to move company pipework

- Dispute around whether any refusal to move company pipework at your request (as the affected landowner) is reasonable.

New water mains

If you requisition a new water main, any dispute around:

- the amount we require you to pay, the undertakings or securities we require you to give, where we'll lay the main for your connection, or the time period in which we'll do this.

New public sewers

If you requisition a new public sewer, any dispute around:

- the amount we require you to pay, the undertakings or securities we require you to give, where we will lay the sewer for your connection, or the time period in which we'll do this.

Exercise of works on private land

- Any dispute about the manner in which we've undertaken work on private land.

Guaranteed standards of service scheme

Any dispute about:

- a failure to meet one of our Guaranteed Standards of Service
- whether or not you're entitled to a compensation payment under the Guaranteed Standards of Service scheme.

Ofwat can be contacted at: The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA.

18 Contact numbers and opening hours

You can call us at the following times:

- Billing enquiries: **0330 303 0277** Monday to Friday (8am to 7pm), Saturday (8.30am to 2pm).
- Minicom (for the deaf and hard of hearing): **0330 303 1265** Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
- Financial assistance: **0800 027 0363** Monday to Friday (8am to 7pm), Saturday (9am to 1pm).
- Water or wastewater (operational issues): **0330 303 0368** Monday to Saturday (7am to 9pm), Sunday (7.30am to 10.30pm).
- Emergency operational issues: **0330 303 0368** 24-hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Apply for a meter: **0330 303 1262** Monday to Friday (8am to 7pm), Saturday (8.30am to 2pm).

To join our Priority Register

Call **0800 027 0800** (free from landlines and mobiles) Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm, and Saturday, 8.30am to 2pm or use our Minicom line, shown above.

19 Privacy Notice

We're committed to protecting and respecting your privacy.

We collect, store and use information about people in a secure, respectful way that complies with the relevant legislation. This includes the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2004.

To find out more about the information we collect and your rights, please visit southernwater.co.uk/privacy-statement.