

# Code of Practice on charges, bills and water meters



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In this leaflet we explain about metering, different ways to pay, and how charges for water and sewerage services are calculated.

Our codes of practice are approved by the industry regulator, Ofwat. A list of other codes for domestic customers can be found on the back of this leaflet. They can be found on our website or you can contact us to get a free copy.

## How are the charges worked out?

Our charges are not allowed to exceed the price limit set by Ofwat. They are worked out each year in accordance with the formula "RPI +/- K". RPI is the Retail Price Index figure and "K" is a figure set by Ofwat the water industry regulator, which is the minimum required by South West Water to operate water and sewerage services in the region and undertake capital investment to meet UK and EU standards.

Taking all factors into account, the overall tariff increase allowed is the K factor plus RPI. This is an average increase or decrease in our charges. The actual percentage increase in your bill may be higher or lower than this average.

## Where can I get a list of your charges?

We review charges annually and publish them each year once Ofwat has approved them. You can read or download them from our website or ask our Accounts Helpline for a copy.

Our charges scheme includes details of charges and tariffs for the current year, types of charges, liability to pay charges, how we apply charges, infrastructure charges, how you can pay and water metering.

## Who is legally liable for our charges?

The occupier of a property is liable for the charges due, unless we have a written agreement that says otherwise. For example, we may have an agreement with the landlord that they are responsible for the charges.

## What are the different types of charges?

There are metered charges if your water is supplied through a meter or unmetered charges which are based on the rateable value of your home.

The charge for each service has two parts: a standing charge and a variable charge.

The standing charge covers some of our costs that do not change with the amount of water you take or the waste water we treat.

The variable charge is worked out on the amount of water you use if you have a water meter or on the rateable value of your property if you have an unmetered supply. This charge covers some of our costs of collecting, treating and transporting drinking water to premises and receiving, treating and disposing of foul sewage, surface water and highway drainage.

If you only receive one of these services, for example our water service, we will only charge you for that service. If you live on the border of our area, another water company may provide one of these services for you and they will bill you separately.

We also have an Assessed Charge for those customers that are unable to have a meter fitted. The Assessed Charge is based on average consumption for the number of occupants living in your house. For further details of the Assessed Charge, please see our Charges Scheme. You can read or download a copy from our website or by calling our Accounts Helpline.

### [What is surface water drainage and highway drainage?](#)

Surface water is the rainwater that falls onto your property and highway drainage is the rainwater which falls on highways, in most cases this drains to the public sewer and we include the cost of removing it in your sewerage charges.

If your surface water does not drain into the public sewer, we may be able to reduce your charges. For more information, please call our Accounts Helpline.

### [What is the Watersure Tariff?](#)

If you receive certain benefits or tax credits and use a lot of water, you may be eligible for a special tariff called Watersure which could mean a lower bill for customers who qualify. Help is available for customers who have a water meter or pay the multi-occupancy assessed charge and face particular difficulties paying their bill because they use a lot of water for essential purposes.

Eligibility for the tariff is set nationally by the Government. To qualify for Watersure you must be in receipt of one or more of the following benefits (or have someone living in your household in receipt of the benefit): Income Support, Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit (unless you are only receiving the family element), Income-related employment and support allowance, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit.

The person in receipt of the benefit must also have three or more children under the age of 19 normally living with them for whom they receive child benefit, or someone in the household who suffers from a medical condition that requires them to use a significant amount of extra water.

If you qualify for help, you will pay an annual amount equivalent to the average household water and sewerage bill in South West Water's area (or your actual metered charges if these are lower than the average household bill).

Please call our Accounts Helpline for a free Watersure Tariff application form. Information is also available on our website.

### [How do you calculate my unmetered bill?](#)

If you don't have a water meter we base your charges on the rateable value of your home. The Inland Revenue's valuation office assessed rateable values until 31 March 1990 and under current legislation those rateable values are still valid for water and sewerage charges.

If you live on your own, have a small family or live in a property with a high rateable value, you may save money by having a water meter fitted.

### [How do you calculate my metered bill?](#)

If your home has a water meter we charge you based on the amount of water you use. Details of when an individual meter is due to be read will be sent to you when you have a meter installed or move into a metered property.

If we are not able to read a meter when it is due to be read we will issue a bill based on an estimate read. The estimate will be based on past consumption at the property for the period for which the bill is issued. If you receive an estimated bill you can read the meter yourself and provide us with your

reading either through our website or by calling our automated meter reading line and we will be happy to send you a revised bill.

### How can I pay my bill?

If your water supply is unmetered and you have not agreed a different payment arrangement with us, your charges are payable in full on 1st April, or you can choose to pay:

- by two instalments on 1 April and 1 October.
- by a maximum of 10 instalments between April and January (if you ask to use this option after April, the charges due will be apportioned on a monthly basis so that they are settled by January). Payment is due on the first of the month.
- payment by 12 instalments is available on request.
- we also offer more flexible ways of paying bills more frequently, such as fortnightly or weekly plans. Call our Accounts Helpline for more information.

If you are on a meter you can choose to pay:

- quarterly when you get your bill.
- quarterly by variable direct debit.
- monthly instalments under our meter payment plan.
- we also offer more flexible ways of paying bills more frequently, such as fortnightly or weekly plans. Call our Accounts Helpline for more information.

### Where can I pay my bill?

If you have a current account, paying by Direct Debit is the easiest way of paying your bill, or you can pay by standing order. Visit our website or call our automated helpline to set up a Direct Debit. Other ways to pay are:

- by debit card on our website or automated card payment line.
- through your own bank or building society (please note some banks now charge for this service).
- at any branch of Lloyds TSB (who charge 30p for a payment made in cash).
- at a Post Office or at our Head Office in Exeter (free of charge).
- by post to our mailing centre: South West Water, PO Box 4762, Worthing, BN11 9NT. (please do not send cash through the post).

If you pay by more frequent instalments you can use Paypoint outlets free of charge.

### I am having problems paying my bill: can you help?

Yes, if you are having difficulties paying your bill, call our Accounts Helpline and we will try to help. We will review your charges with you to check whether a different charging method or tariff would help lower your bill. We will also discuss your personal circumstances with you to help us try and agree a payment plan that will help you pay.

We also have a fund to help customers who are trying to pay bills but who are having difficulties for reasons of severe financial hardship or personal circumstances. Details and application forms are available from Citizens Advice Bureaux.

More details can be found in our Code of Practice on Payment and debt recovery.

## What do I do if I am moving home?

You need to tell us that you are moving by calling us, visiting our website or writing to us to let us know your change of address details. If you have a water meter and are moving house, please tell us at least two working days, but preferably five working days, beforehand so that we can take the final meter reading. If you are unable to provide adequate notice, we may not be able to read your meter on the day you move and may have to issue an estimated final bill. Alternatively, you could read your own meter on your last day and call our Accounts Helpline with your reading and new address details.

Your responsibility for the water supply ceases on the day you move. However, if you give us less than two days prior notice you will remain responsible for the metered charges up to:

- 28 days after we find that you are no longer responsible for the account, or
- the date the meter is normally read (the end of the charging period), or
- the date a new occupier tells us they are responsible for the account.

If you move into a property where there is a meter you will be charged on this basis. You will be unable to revert to pay unmetered charges.

If you are moving out of our area, we will send a final bill to your new address for anything you owe, or, if you have overpaid, we will send you a refund. If you are moving within our area, we will transfer any balance to the account for your new address. We will also bill you from the date you move in.

## What is a Common Billing Agreement?

In the cases of existing blocks of flats where it is not possible to meter each flat individually because of shared plumbing

and a shared connection to our water main, it may be possible for us to install a single water meter which will record all water used in the block. However for this to happen, each occupier will have to confirm in writing that they agree to this charging arrangement and someone will have to accept responsibility to pay the bill. This could be a managing agent, landlord or a freeholder and we will need to satisfy ourselves that the person or organisation who will be liable to pay is in a satisfactory financial position to do so before agreeing to a common billing arrangement.

Once the meter is installed, it will be a matter for the person or organisation paying the bill to determine how the charges are shared amongst the occupants of the flats. This will be a private matter and we suggest that this is agreed between the occupants before a request for a common billing agreement is made.

Once we have received written agreements from all parties, we will fit a water meter on the shared supply pipe and send one bill for all the properties to the person accepting responsibility for the bill. They will then pay us the water and sewerage charges due for services used in all of the flats.

In the event that a bill is not paid, or the person or organisation liable to pay the bill asks to relinquish that responsibility without having arranged for another party to take over the liability to pay bills, charges due for services supplied to the flats will revert to standard unmetered rateable value based charges from the start of any period for which there are unpaid charges. This payment default arrangement will form part of the written agreement for a common billing arrangement.

### Who has a water meter?

Most of the homes in our region now have water meters fitted either because all new houses since 1990 are built with a water meter installed or because our customers have opted to have one.

Additionally, under Regulations made by the Secretary of State for the Environment, there are circumstances where we can fit a meter because water is being used for non-domestic purposes, such as a fixed garden sprinkler and certain sized swimming pools, ponds and baths. Further details can be found in our Charges Scheme.

### How can I find out about having a meter fitted?

You can call our automated meter option request line for a free pack and application form which will help you to estimate your annual water use and whether your charges would be less on a metered basis or you can visit and apply on our website.

If you wish to have a meter installed, we will install one free of charge if the cost of doing so is not unreasonable and it is practical to install a meter. If you choose to have a water meter fitted and then find that you do not benefit by having one then you can opt to revert back to un-metered charges within 12 months of the meter being installed (or within one month of receiving a bill showing a full 12 months' water use). Should you choose to revert then you will be liable for metered charges up until the time we receive your request. Reversion is only applicable the first time you opt to have a meter.

The meter will remain in place and should you move house the new occupier will be charged on a metered basis.

### How quickly will you install my meter?

We will aim to install your meter within three months of receiving your application form. If we do not, we will use readings taken after the meter has been installed to backdate charges to the date by which the meter should have been installed.

### Can I choose my meter location?

Our preference is to install meters externally where a meter box already exists.

Where there is not a meter box, we will agree either an external or internal location for the meter with you. We will advise you of our preferred location. If you would like the meter installed in a different location, you can request this and the meter can be fitted in your preferred location as long as it is practicable and any additional costs incurred by doing this are met by you. If a priority services customer requests a different meter location so it can be read more easily, we will consider waiving these costs.

### Who is responsible for the meter?

The meter and its connections are our responsibility. It is an offence to carry out any work which might prevent your meter from registering volumes accurately or which might affect the working of the meter or require its disconnection.

### Are water meters accurate?

Our meters are very reliable but if you think your meter is not recording your usage accurately please call our Accounts Helpline and we will investigate.

If, following our investigation, you continue to have concerns, you can ask us to test the accuracy of your meter in accordance with the provisions of the Water (Meters) Regulations 1988. There will be a charge for this if the test shows that the meter is correctly recording use.

We will give you an application form for the meter to be tested. The meter will be sent to a Trading Standards approved test centre for testing and a new meter will be installed. A copy of the test results will be sent to you. There will be a charge for this if the test shows that the meter is correctly recording use.

If your meter is found to be over-recording we will amend your bill, if it has been under recording we will not adjust your bill, please see our Charges Scheme for more details.

#### How often should I check my meter?

A monthly check could help you to spot a leak early and limit water loss. Details of how to check your meter are available on our website or within our Code of Practice on Leakage for domestic customers.

#### Do you offer help for people with additional needs?

Information can be provided in large print, Braille or audio formats and we provide extra help for people with special needs. To find out more, call our Accounts Helpline and ask about Priority Services. (Minicom users 0800 169 9965).

#### How can I contact Ofwat?

Ofwat protects the interests of customers of all water and sewerage companies in accordance with legislative provisions and Government licences. They can be contacted at:

Water Services Regulation  
Authority (Ofwat) Head Office,  
Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street,  
Birmingham B5 4UA

Telephone: 0121 644 7500

Fax No: 0121 644 7622

Email: [enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk)

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, certain disputes can be referred to Ofwat or an independent arbitrator for a decision. Further details can be found in our Complaints and compliments leaflet. Where we can not reach an agreement with you in such cases, we will tell you of your right to refer the matter to another body.

#### If you are not satisfied

Please let us know if you have a complaint about your water or sewerage service, you can let us know by telephoning our Services Helpline, or alternatively you can write to us or email a complaint to us by visiting our website.

In the unlikely event that we are not able to resolve a complaint to your full satisfaction and our position has been reviewed by a senior South West Water manager, you can refer your concerns to the Consumer Council for Water Western Region (CCWater) who will investigate independently. CCWater is an independent statutory body which protects customer interests and investigates customer complaints. They can be contacted at:

Consumer Council for  
Water Western Region:

Telephone: 01392 428028

Local rate: 08457 959059

Minicom: 0121 345 1044

In writing:

Consumer Council for Water,  
9th Floor, Renslade House, Bonhay  
Road, Exeter, EX4 3AW

Online: [ccwater.org.uk](http://ccwater.org.uk)

## How can I contact you?

We are open 24 hours a day for emergency calls.

Our Accounts contact centre is open 8am to 8pm Monday–Friday, 8am to 5pm on Saturday and closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

### Telephone numbers

Accounts helpline .....	0800 169 1133
Services and emergency helpline .....	0800 169 1144
Debt helpline .....	0800 083 0283
Water conservation .....	0800 378 937
Minicom users .....	0800 169 9965

### Automated services

Leave a meter reading .....	0800 083 4247
Card payment line .....	0800 230 0750
Direct debit set-up.....	0800 083 2365
Request a water meter pack.....	0800 083 4301

Website: [southwestwater.co.uk](http://southwestwater.co.uk)

Email us: [customercontact@southwestwater.co.uk](mailto:customercontact@southwestwater.co.uk)

Write to us: South West Water,  
PO Box 4762,  
Worthing BN11 9NT

### Codes of Practice

- Charges, bills and water meters
- Complaints and compliments
- Our Customer promise
- Leakage for domestic customers
- Our water supply service
- Our waste water service
- Payment and debt recovery
- Priority services

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