

Charges scheme

2010 - 2011

Summary
explanation



Introduction

This booklet provides an explanation of our charges for the provision of water and wastewater services. It is meant mainly for household and small business customers. The actual charges have, where applicable, been approved by the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) and are set out in the enclosed leaflets.

The full text of our Charges Schemes is available on request. This covers many other types of charge such as Trade Effluent, Infrastructure charges and others which do not normally apply to household customers.

While this explanation summarises the Charges Schemes, it is not written in “legal” language so it is less detailed and precise. If there is any dispute about the exact meaning of any part of the explanation, the wording of the full text will take precedence.

General

The charges made for the provision of water and wastewater services reflect the present cost of providing such services, and are also an important source of revenue for investment in the infrastructure which supports them (eg water treatment works). This essential investment will ensure that the Company is in a position to meet current and future customer demand.

If you are moving into a property in our area and want to know how the water supply and/or wastewater charges will be calculated, visit www.thameswater.co.uk, telephone or write to our Customer Centre, see back of booklet, and we will be pleased to advise you.

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Charges for unmetered water supplies

Charges for the unmetered supply of water (i.e. customers who do not have a meter) are made up of two parts:

Chargeable Value - this is based on the rateable value of the property as set by the District Valuers (now part of the Inland Revenue) and as shown in the last published valuation list (31st March 1990). Charges for the use of water (and the disposal & treatment of wastewater), are made according to “so many pence in the pound” of the property’s rateable value.

The “amount in the pound” varies to reflect the geographical variations in house types and rateable values.

Such charges are listed in the Unmetered Charges Leaflet, and are itemised on each bill.

Fixed charge - this includes the customer-related costs of billing and enquiries, and an amount to reduce the proportion of the bill which is calculated on the rateable value of the property.

Special or other circumstances - the way in which we charge may be affected by special factors such as:

- one property having both an unmetered and a metered supply. In such cases the unmetered supply will be charged according to a pro-rata assessment of the rateable value of the property.
- a property not appearing in the last published valuation list (as at 31 March 1990). In such cases the customer may request a meter free of charge, but if this is not practicable or too expensive, we would apply the household assessed charge. Otherwise, the charge would need to be based on “notional value”, which is based on criteria such as size and location of property”
- separate building units which are connected together (other than by an open road) and occupied by the same customer will be regarded as one complete unit and charged according to the combined rateable value of the units.
- a domestic garage, car space or store area. In such cases an annual charge for each garage, car space, or store area will be applied as set out in our Sundry Charges Leaflet.
- a common pipe supplying water to two or more properties. The consumer within each property will pay the charges as if they were supplied with water by their own individual pipes.
- an occupier of a property not connected to our water supplies but who, as a result of that occupation, has the right to use an unmetered supply of water from another connected property, will still be required to pay our charges.

Unoccupied properties

If a property is unoccupied but connected to our services and capable of occupation (that is, furnished), normal rate based and fixed charges are payable. If a property is unoccupied because of building work or renovation, normal rate-based and fixed charges are payable if the contract value is less than £100,000. If it is more, the charge will be 0.17 % of contract value. We may also cancel both fixed and rate based charges if the owner of a property has left it unoccupied and does not expect to return to it - for example, because they have gone to live in a care home or nursing home.

The above allowances must be claimed by the customer and no claim will be allowed for any period for more than 6 months prior to the date of the claim.

No charges will be payable in respect of any period when a property is temporarily unoccupied and the supply has been disconnected by us at the owner’s request.

Charges for metered water supplies

If you have a water meter, you will be charged according to the amount of water you use, as well as fixed charges. Such charges are made up as follows:

volume charge - based on the amount of water you use, as recorded by the meter, multiplied by the charge we make for each cubic metre as listed in the Metered Charges leaflet.

fixed charge - this charge includes the customer-related costs of billing and enquiries, and reading and maintaining meters.

Special metered charges

Large user tariff - a customer who uses an exceptionally large amount of water will be charged a special rate. Details are shown in the Metered Charges leaflet. This will normally apply to customers who use large amounts of water for industrial purposes.

Testing and reading meters

Where a consumer requires Thames Water to test a meter, a charge for testing will only be made if the test proves that the meter is recording within the tolerances referred to in the "Water (Meters) Regulations 1988" and will not exceed any charges prescribed by the Regulations. This could lead to either a refund being made to the consumer, or an invoice to the customer for any balance of charges that may be due.

Adjustment of charges for metered supplies

Metered supply charges will be adjusted in the following circumstances:

- if a property is unoccupied but connected to our services and capable of occupation (that is furnished), normal charges are payable. We will however waive the fixed charges on a property with a metered supply if a property is unoccupied for a continuous period of at least three months. The above allowance must be claimed by the customer and no claim will be allowed for any period for more than 6 months prior to the date of the claim.
- if you are a household customer and we find that your meter is not working correctly, we will estimate the charges based on your normal use. The period we will use for this estimate will be back to the last meter reading but one, or six months from the last reading, whichever is the shorter.

- if you have paid your metered water services bill for a period of time when it was later discovered your meter was faulty, we will make an appropriate adjustment to the charge which will take this into account.
- if a water meter is connected to your property but we have never issued you with a water services bill, we will send you a bill to include our estimate of the volume of water supplied during any period before the meter was fitted.
- if there is a leak from a metered supply to a household property, as long as the leak is fixed within six weeks of it being confirmed, we will not charge for the amount of water that has been lost through leakage. The adjustment will be based on how much water has been used in the past, with the maximum leak allowance given for two billing periods, plus the leak repair time of a maximum of six weeks. If there is no record of past use, an adjustment will be made based on the typical water use for a similar property. If water use is significantly lower after the leak has been fixed we will consider granting a further leak allowance.

For more information, see our Code of Practice "When Your Water Supply Has a Leak".

Business assessed charges

Where the premises supplied are not occupied as a home and it is not practicable to fit a meter our charges will be made on the basis of an assessment of the amount of water to be supplied and used by you. This will be based on what you tell us about the type of business carried on at the premises and the number of people working there.

If you do not supply us with the requested information we will make an assessment based on our reasonable assumptions of the amount of water you are expected to use on an average basis for similar premises, or on an equivalent basis for charges made for unmetered water supplies.

Households opting to have a water meter

Requesting a metered supply

If you receive an unmetered supply of water you have the right to ask us to fit a meter. You can make this request online at www.thameswater.co.uk, or contact our Customer Centre on the telephone number or at the address shown at the back of the booklet. Once the meter is fitted, you will then be charged for water and wastewater services on a metered basis. We will not make an installation charge for fitting the meter.

If you are a tenant, and are responsible for paying our charges, you should tell your landlord that you are applying for a meter.

We will select the meter location. If you decide that you would like the meter fitted in a different location, and this would be more expensive, we will ask you to pay the difference in cost.

You will pay metered charges from the date the meter is fitted.

If your meter is not fitted by a date three months after you made your request (“the due date”) you will only be responsible for the payment of fixed charges from the due date until the meter is actually fitted, unless the meter could not be fitted within this timescale due to a lack of co-operation by the customer.

However, we will not be obliged to fit a meter where:

- it is not reasonably practicable. Installation is normally reasonably practicable if the whole supply can be controlled by a single meter, and if there is an easily accessible length of pipe close to the point where the pipe enters the property.
- it would cost us an unreasonable amount of money. This would normally be the case if we would have to fit more than one meter, or make any changes to the supply pipe.

If you should disagree with our decision not to fit a meter, you can ask the Water Services Regulation Authority to make the final decision.

If we cannot fit a meter

If you have asked us to fit a meter but we have found that it is not reasonably practicable or too expensive to do so at your property, you can write to us stating that you would like to pay the assessed household charge, which is linked to the size of your property or single occupation, as set out in the Unmetered Charges leaflet.

We will tell you about this option when we confirm that a meter cannot be fitted. You will then pay the lower of the assessed household charge or rateable value.

Changing your mind

If you have asked us to fit a meter you can ask us to go back to charging you on the unmetered basis if you are unhappy with the metered charges. **You must ask us to do this within 12 months of the fitting of your meter, or within one month of receiving your second metered bill**, whichever is the later.

You can only request us to go back to charging you on an unmetered basis if you have not asked us to do this before, and you still live in the same property at which the metered charge basis was set up with you as the occupier or anyone who lived at the property at that time still lives there.

As soon as we receive your written request, and the above conditions apply, we will once again bill you on an unmetered basis.

However, please note that the meter will remain in place and the next occupier will be charged on a metered basis.

Selective water metering

It is the policy of Thames Water to meter premises:

a) which have not been connected to the mains before, such as newly built properties or separate units created by the conversion of existing connected properties;

b) where water is used for swimming pools and/or garden sprinklers;

c) where the main use is not for residential purposes.

d) where there has been a change of occupier. This policy will not necessarily apply to the whole region. If you wish to know whether it applies to your area, please telephone or write to our Customer Centre, see back of booklet, and we will be pleased to advise you.

Normally, where premises are occupied as a home and the present occupier has previously paid charges on an unmetered basis, we may not impose metered charges without the customer's consent. We can, however, always require customers to pay by meter if they use water for non-essential purposes such as garden watering by sprinkler or automatically filling large ponds or swimming pools.

We will select the meter location. If you decide that you would like the meter fitted in a different location, and this would be more expensive, we will ask you to pay the difference in cost.

Wastewater charges

Wastewater charges where the water supply is unmetered

Charges for the disposal and treatment of wastewater are made up of the chargeable value and fixed charge, as described in the section 'Charges for unmetered water supplies' and listed in the Unmetered Charges leaflet.

Wastewater charges where the water supply is metered

Wastewater charges where there is a metered water supply will be calculated by the volume of water supplied by Thames Water or by another company, along with the relevant fixed charge, as listed in the Metered Charges leaflet.

Additional charges and variations

Additional charges and variations to the wastewater charges will be made when the following circumstances apply:

- a trade effluent charge may apply (See the Trade Effluent Charges leaflet) where wastewater produced in the course of a business process is discharged to the public sewer.
- the reception, treatment and disposal of the contents of cesspools and septic tanks are charged on the basis of our measurement of the strength of the effluent as shown in the Sundry Charges leaflet.
- an allowance will be made where it is shown to our satisfaction that more than 10% of the water recorded by your meter (excluding any amount lost through leakage) is not discharged into a public sewer. This is called a "sewage abatement" allowance. It is usually applicable to business premises where water is used for processes, or sports ground where most of the use is for ground watering. It is unusual for a household property to qualify for this allowance.
- we reserve the right to review the validity of such allowances annually and make adjustment to accounts where it is shown that wastewater abatement allowances are no longer valid.
- where a property discharges only surface water into the public sewers, rate based or volume charges will not apply.

Payment of charges for water and wastewater services

Nearly all properties in London and other large towns are connected to surface water or combined public sewers which carry away the rainwater, but some properties, especially in rural areas where there may be no surface water sewers, are not connected and have soakaways instead. If rainwater does not drain to the public sewerage system from your property (or from another property above it) you can claim a rebate. We may need to check that there is no connection to our sewerage system. You can get the form by telephoning our Customer Centre.

For houses, the rebate will be applied from the beginning of the billing period or financial year in which we receive the claim, whichever is the earlier. For other premises the rebate will be applied from the beginning of the financial year, i.e. 1st April 2010, for claims received in 2010/11.

If payments are outstanding on your account, the rebate given will be deducted from the money owed.

The person responsible for paying our charges will be the occupier, unless we have agreed that another person may accept responsibility.

If you are a tenant and the landlord has agreed with us to accept responsibility for payment of our charges, the landlord may recover the amount of the charges from you, depending on the terms of your tenancy agreement. This will usually be collected by the landlord together with your rent payments. It is advisable for you to check the wording of your tenancy agreement and, if in doubt, consult your landlord.

Unmetered water supply and wastewater charges

Payable in advance on 1st April

Unmetered water supply and/or wastewater charges, including any fixed charges, will be due and payable in advance on 1st April each year.

Paying by instalments

We do, however, offer a number of instalment payment methods such as:

- two, eight, ten or twelve instalments payable on dates to be agreed with us.
- customers who find it easier to pay more frequently, such as fortnightly, can do so but they will need to make special arrangements with us.

Each instalment must be paid by the due date, otherwise the whole year's charges will become payable immediately.

Occupation of a property for part of a year

If you start to receive water and/or wastewater services from us after 1st April, the charges due will be on a pro-rata basis and will reflect the period from the start date to the next 31st March.

If you leave a property or cease to receive a water supply and/or wastewater services from us and you have paid the charges in advance of the vacation date, a credit will be made available to you for the period from when you stopped receiving services from us at your property, to the date up to which you have paid. This also applies to other special circumstances such as death or bankruptcy.

Metered water supply and wastewater charges

Payment due dates and monthly instalments

The charges for metered supplies will be due for payment as soon as the volume of water supplied has been established and a bill has been issued to you.

Instead of paying each bill when you get it, you can have a "Payment Plan" which means that you pay monthly instalments worked out by us to cover the amount of water you are using.

We will adjust the instalments each year, after reading the meter. Each instalment must be paid within 21 days of the due date, or the whole of the metered charges which remain unpaid will be due immediately.

Customers who find it easier to pay more frequently, such as fortnightly, can do so but they will need to make special arrangements with us.

Meter Readings

We will take meter readings at intervals suitable to the customer's usage. Normally we read meters and send bills every six months for household customers, and either monthly or every three months for business customers. If a reading has not been taken for any reason, we may provide an estimated bill for that period.

If an estimated bill is sent, you can read the meter yourself and give us the meter reading. We will send you a revised bill if you let us have your reading within 28 days of the date of the bill.

Pro-rata payments and credits

If you have had a meter fitted during a period for which you have received a bill for unmetered charges, you will pay on a metered basis from the date the meter is installed. We will make any necessary adjustments to your bill.

If you should receive a bill which covers a period when new volume charges have been introduced, we will charge at the old and new rates for the specific periods to which they applied.

You may still be liable for metered charges even after you have left a property unless you give us at least two working days notice. However, if you want us to read your meter when you leave, you should give us at least two weeks notice.

Vulnerable customers

The Government has defined some types of customers as 'Vulnerable' because they have to use large quantities of water for essential purposes and may not be able to afford to pay for this. These are customers who receive certain specified state benefits such as Income related Employment & Support Allowance and either;

a) receive child benefit for at least three children, in full time education, under the age of 19,

or

b) have to use significant additional volumes of water because someone living in the household has been diagnosed with a medical condition that requires this eg. severe skin disorder.

Where a property is charged on a metered basis and you can demonstrate that you are a 'Vulnerable customer' within the criteria set down by the Government, you will be able to pay the lower of either the metered charges raised as a result of your meter readings (or estimates), or the WaterSure tariff as set out in our WaterSure and Metered Charges leaflets for the respective period covered by each bill.

Each year you will be asked to show us that you still are a 'Vulnerable customer' as defined by the Government.

The Government's aim is to protect these customers from unduly high metered charges, so customers who do not have water meters do not qualify for these provisions.

More information can be obtained from our website at www.thameswater.co.uk or telephone us on 0845 9200 888.

How to pay your bill

We have a wide range of payment options to suit all our customers. These are:

- **direct debit.** This is the easiest and most convenient method - all you need to do is fill in the form on your bill and send it back to us, or ring our Customer Centre and give your bank details. Payments will be collected automatically from your bank or building society account. We will send you regular statements showing how much we are going to collect, and if anything goes wrong any incorrect payments will be credited straight back to your account without fuss.
- **standing order.** You will need to get a special form from us for this, and then send it on to your bank. Unlike direct debit, standing orders need new instructions from you to your bank each year (or more often if you have a meter).

- using your debit/credit card **online** at www.thameswater.co.uk or by calling us on 0845 9200 888

- **at a bank – cash or cheque** Take the payment slip to the bank with your payment. If you pay at your own bank or a branch of the National Westminster Bank, this service is usually free of charge.

- **Using the home banking facility** - by quoting your bank account number and Thames Water account number – 00286125, sort code 57-27-53

- **Using a PayPoint facility** - by taking your cash payment to a PayPoint outlet displaying the PayPoint symbol

- **By post** – send your cheque or postal order (not cash) to Thames Water, Customer Centre, PO Box 234, Swindon, SN38 3TW

- **At the Post Office** - subject to the Post Office's transaction fee. As at 1 April 2009 this fee is £2.30 but it can change each year. Payments should normally be made in the amounts and by the dates shown on your bill.

If you have a Personal Payment Card, however, you can make payments of any amounts at any time, as long as you have paid at least the amount of each instalment by the due date for that instalment. For example, if a monthly instalment shown on your bill is £30, you may prefer to make three payments of £10 each during the month before the due date.

Department for Work and Pensions direct payments

If you owe arrears from previous charging periods and receive benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions, you may be able to pay the arrears by direct payments. This means that agreed amounts would be deducted from your benefit and paid to us. Some customers find this a help in budgeting.

If you would like to join this scheme please contact us on 0845 9200 888.

The role of CCWater and how to contact them

The Consumer Council of Water (CCWater) provides a strong voice for water and wastewater consumers in England and Wales and keep in close contact with companies that provide these services as well as the consumers themselves. CCWater London and South East region can be contacted at:

1st Floor
Victoria Square House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B2 4AJ

Tel: 08457 581658 or 0207 931 8502

Our complaints procedure

A copy of our complaints procedure “Our Quality Promise” can be found at www.thameswater.co.uk/literature, under Customer Guarantee Scheme or contact us on 0845 9200 800.

We are committed to providing you with the best possible service. This commitment is backed up by Customer Guarantee Scheme. We also offer a comprehensive range of additional services, at no extra charge, for customers requiring additional assistance. For more information, visit www.thameswater.co.uk or contact us on 0845 9200 800.

Getting in touch with us

Online www.thameswater.co.uk

We offer a range of online services:

Make a payment, tell us you're moving, find water-saving tips, request a meter, and more.

By telephone

Billing

0845 9200 888

Minicom service if you are deaf or hard of hearing:

0845 7200 899

We have a wide range of self-service options available 24 hours a day, including:

- Pay your bill with a debit or credit card and hear your balance
- Set up a Direct Debit or payment plan
- Provide a meter reading or request a meter

For queries relating to the payment of your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing queries, you can speak with our Customer Service Team.

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm

Saturday 8am to 1pm

Water and wastewater services

0845 9200 800

Minicom service if you are deaf or hard of hearing:

0845 7200 898

- For water and wastewater enquiries
- For emergencies
- Other non-billing enquiries

To contact us from abroad +44 1793 366011

By post

Thames Water, PO Box 286, Swindon, SN38 2RA

This leaflet can be sent to you in braille, large print or audio format upon request.