

# Code of Practice

important helpful  
information and  
advice for  
household  
customers



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# 1. Introduction

This booklet is a guide to the services we offer to household customers. It sets out our policies and practices, including information about our charges and bills. Helpful advice is also given about what to do, and what your rights are, if you need help or if things go wrong.

We have made this advice consistent with the legislation that regulates our activities. However, should there be any conflict between the legislation and what we say in this Code, the legislation will prevail.

Our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) also has helpful information and advice. If you cannot find the information you require on our website, please telephone us on **0845 9200 800** so we can help you locate it. Section 11 of this booklet lists other informative leaflets. Any of these leaflets can be obtained from our website or by telephoning our Customer Centre, and are available in large print, Braille and audiotape upon request.

## Making contact

For water and wastewater services emergencies, you can speak with a Customer Services representative 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: **0845 9200 800**

For queries relating to the payment of your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing queries, you can speak with a Customer Services representative Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 8am to 1pm. At all other times and bank holidays there is an automated service available: **0845 9200 888**.

Voicemail service for customers letting us know their meter readings: **0845 300 1131**

For reporting leaks: **0800 714 614**

**We also offer a textphone service for our deaf and hard of hearing customers:**

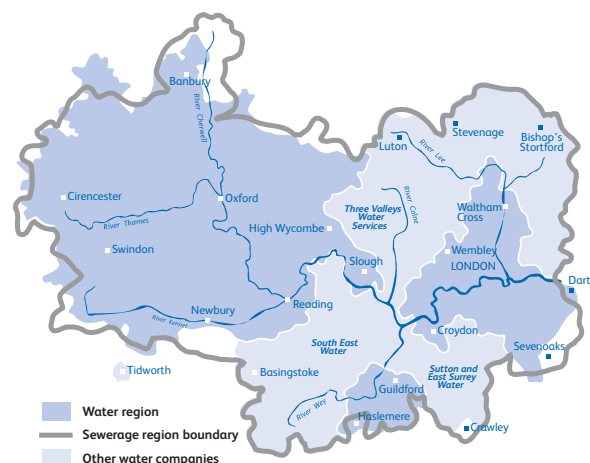
For emergencies, literature and all other non-billing enquiries: **0845 7200 898**

For queries relating to the payment of your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing queries: **0845 7200 899**

If you need to write to us, our address details are at the back of this booklet in section 12.

# About Thames Water

We operate within a 13,000 square km (5,000 square miles) area, from London in the east to the Cotswolds in the west. A number of other water supply companies also have a duty to provide water supplies in this area, but we are the only company responsible for wastewater services. The map below shows the main areas of operation.



## The laws protecting you

Private sector companies have been providing all public water supply and wastewater services in England and Wales since 1989. We must abide by laws that maintain and strengthen your legal rights. Independent regulators make sure that we meet our obligations under these laws. These regulators are:

### Ofwat (as governed by the Water Services Regulation Authority)

One of Ofwat's duties is to protect your interests as a customer. Ofwat has approved this Code of Practice and must make sure that we meet the conditions of our licence.

These conditions include:

- pricing policy for our services
- monitoring the levels of service we provide
- guidance about what information we must give you.

### The Consumer Council for Water Thames Region (CCWater Thames)

CCWater Thames has the role of acting as customer champion and can review any matter that affects your water and wastewater services. One of its duties is to investigate complaints that we may not have resolved to your satisfaction. Its services are free to you. Our complaints procedure sets out how we aim to resolve complaints. More details about our complaints procedure can be found in section 8.

### **The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)**

DEFRA sets national government policy for water and controls some very important areas of our work. In particular the Drinking Water Inspectorate sets the standards for the quality of drinking water, which includes the European Union's standards, and is responsible for making sure that we meet them.

### **The Environment Agency (EA)**

The EA is responsible for matters relating to rivers, groundwaters, flood defence, pollution control, fisheries and navigation. In addition, it regulates both the quality and the quantity of water we take from - and return to - the rivers, other inland waters and underground sources.

### **Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI)**

The DWI is part of DEFRA. It checks that the drinking water we supply is safe and meets the water quality standards – these are reported against compliance with drinking water standards in England, which are based on European Union Directives. It achieves this by making sure that:

- we test the quality of the water we supply, we meet the standards set, and we make the results available to the public
- our water treatment processes and distribution system are operated and maintained properly
- we sustain our programme of work to improve water quality. These are published in Ofwat's annual 'Levels of Service' report
- our actions to resolve operational problems are correct and appropriate.

### **Local Health Agencies**

Local Authority Environmental Health Officers and the District Health Authorities monitor public health in the communities we serve; we keep them informed about water quality issues in their areas.

### **Relating external standards to our quality of service**

We measure our standards of service in many different ways, using 'benchmarks' of service judged by other organisations. External awards endorse our success in achieving increasingly high standards in customer service, as well as encouraging our emphasis on continuous improvement and good value for money. Examples of external standards relating to our quality of service are:

- water quality standards – these are reported against compliance with drinking water standards in England, which are based on European Union Directives
- environmental performance - we publish a Corporate and Social Responsibility Review that sets out the standards we meet and gives details of the projects we undertake to meet our environmental obligations
- Ofwat's measures of service, which are important benchmarks for the industry. These are published in Ofwat's annual 'Levels of Service' report and we strive to perform well against them
- we provide a comprehensive range of specially designed services such as large print, Braille, audiotape, textphone and sign language. Disability Discrimination Act 1995 audits together with external on-going support ensures our professional approach in responding to customers requiring additional assistance is maintained.

## 2. Water services

**Our business is to supply treated water to our customers and to connect all new customers to a water supply. This section tells you what services we provide and explains your responsibilities.**

**Information can also be found on our website [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk).**

### Water quality standards

The water supplied by Thames Water is safe and is of very good quality. Independent assessment by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) confirms that your drinking water is better than ever.

The quality of water for household purposes is controlled by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1999, which are set by the Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs. They cover how the water should taste, look and smell, as well as other aspects of the quality of the water, such as chemical and mineral content.

We must supply water that at least meets the Regulations. However, the Secretary of State may allow us to supply water, in specified areas, which does not meet one of the many standards, whilst we invest in improvement programmes. Any relaxation of this nature is for a limited time, and subject to there being no threat to public health.

Each year, we carry out around half a million water quality tests. Please call our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800** if you would like to be sent a report on water quality in your area, free of charge or if you would like to make an appointment to view our water quality records, which are held at our Head Office:

**Thames Water  
Clearwater Court  
Vastern Road  
Reading  
RG1 8DB**

### Enquiries about water quality

We always aim to resolve your enquiry as quickly and efficiently as possible. Contact us immediately on **0845 9200 800** if you are concerned about the quality or safety of your drinking water supply. We will ask you a few simple questions to identify the cause of your concern and provide you with as much information as possible to reassure you about your water quality.

### Resolving problems

Occasionally we may ask our scientists to investigate further. If this is the case, our scientists will attempt to call you within one working day to offer advice and inform you of what action we will be taking. If your concern is regarding illness or petrochemical contamination, our scientists will attempt to call you within one hour, to respond to your initial enquiry. To resolve the problem it may be necessary for us to inspect your plumbing system, or take water samples for testing. In such cases we will make a convenient appointment with you.

If we need to test the water we will take a sample for laboratory analysis. We will aim to send you a full written report within 10 working days, but if we find anything unusual with the sample we will telephone you to let you know the results as soon as they are available.

In the unlikely event that there is a possibility of your water being contaminated, we will take immediate action to rectify the problem. We will inform you immediately and tell you what precautions you should take, such as boiling your water. Where we advise you to boil the water, a boil notice will be delivered to you. Occasionally, particularly where large numbers of properties are involved, we will use the media as well as mobile loudspeaker vans to keep you informed.

### Discoloured or cloudy water

Water supplies are affected by changes in the pressure of the water in our mains, due to burst pipes or essential maintenance work. This can occasionally disturb sediment in the pipes, resulting in a brown discoloration to the water. Alternatively, air can be trapped in our mains, resulting in a cloudy white appearance to the water. Whilst unsightly, these are not harmful and will normally clear quickly. If this becomes a regular problem, please tell us.

### Independent advice

If you are concerned about your hot water, or bathroom water, or would prefer someone independent to reassure you about the quality of your drinking water, you can contact your Environmental Health Officer at your local council, who will be able to help and advise you.

If you are unhappy with the response you get from Thames Water when you telephone or write to us, you can refer your concerns either to CCWater (telephone **0845 758 1658**) or the DWI (telephone **020 7082 8024**) who may investigate on your behalf. Further information is also available from the DWI website at [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk).

### Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999

In the interests of all our customers, there are Water Regulations to help us safeguard the water supply from being contaminated or wasted. These include important rules about the type, arrangement, standard and maintenance of plumbing, appliances and outside taps attached to the main water supply. For example, you will need a 'non-return valve' to stop water flowing back out of many appliances, water softeners and outside taps.

You (or your landlord) are responsible for your water supply pipework and making sure that your plumbing system is in good order. This means that you may need to know about the Regulations that govern plumbing installations. Your plumbing and appliances must meet the Regulations and be properly maintained. There are penalties if these Regulations are ignored or broken. For more information, visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) or call us on **0845 9200 800** and ask for details.

### Water quantity

We have a duty to give you a constant supply of water which is enough to meet your normal household needs – this is drinking, washing, cooking, central heating and sanitation. Exceptional weather conditions may reduce the amount of water we have, so we may need to restrict the amount of water that you use:

- hosepipe and sprinkler bans should not be needed more than once in 10 years on average. If there are hosepipe and sprinkler bans, there will also be public appeals for restraint in using water. Remember, during hosepipe and sprinkler bans you can still water your garden using watering cans and buckets. Doing all you can to be water efficient would help everyone. Advice about water efficiency is available on our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk)
- where necessary we encourage people to save water, using publicity and the media. We may also have to reduce water pressure in order to lessen the impact of bursts and leaks. It should not be necessary to introduce this more than once in 20 years on average
- drought order restrictions on using water imposed under the Water Resources Act 1991 banning non essential use (e.g. in parks and sports grounds) should not be necessary more often than once in 50 years on average
- major cuts in supply on a rota basis and using standpipes should not be necessary more than once in 100 years on average
- household customers can claim £20 for each day or part of a day that the supply of water for domestic purposes is interrupted as a result of emergency

restrictions authorised by drought orders. The maximum compensation entitlement will be equal to the average household bill in our water supply area for the preceding financial year.

There would be no entitlement to compensation for household customers if the circumstances were so exceptional that it would, in Ofwat's view, have been unreasonable for us to have avoided the interruption.

We are investing heavily in measures to reduce the chances of water shortages including:

- improving our distribution network – new ways of moving water from place to place such as extending the very successful Thames Water Ring Main in London
- reducing leakage - we have around 32,000 kilometres of mains and around 18 million joints, some of which are 150 years old. We are working hard to reduce leakage from our mains, with total replacement where necessary
- developing resources – 70 million litres of water a day can be pumped from Gatehampton, near Reading; using rising groundwater in London; diverting excess water in winter that can be stored in a large natural underground reservoir we have developed in North London; and a number of water recycling initiatives are being encouraged
- involving our customers – we give water wise tips to gardeners and householders. Visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) or call **0845 9200 800** and ask for more details.

Our policy is to fit a water meter at every property where a garden sprinkler or swimming pool is used. This is because they use a large amount of extra water and normal water bills do not cover the cost of such use. If you use a garden sprinkler or swimming pool, please let us know so that we can arrange installation of a water meter. More details on this policy can be found under 'Optional Water Metering Scheme' in section 4.

### Water pressure

The pressure at which we supply water should be enough to make sure water reaches the top storey of every building unless the building (for example, a block of flats) is so high that water will not flow to it by gravity from our reservoir, tank or tower.

In most cases, you will have an adequate water supply pressure. As a guide, if you have a suitable single service pipe, the first tap in your home should be able to fill a 4.5 litre (1 gallon) bucket in 30 seconds with all the other taps and appliances turned off.

Pressure and flow rates in your home can be affected by a number of things:

- the height of the property above the water main and its height compared with our reservoir
- the condition of your own pipes and fittings
- faulty, or partially closed, inside stopvalves
- the number of properties supplied by the same pipework
- peak water demand, with lots of people using water at the same time.

If you think that your water pressure is too low, we will investigate free of charge. If we are responsible for the problem, we will tell you what we are going to do. If it is not our fault, we will offer advice as to what you can do to improve the situation.

Under the provisions of our Customer Guarantee Scheme you may be entitled to a payment of £25 for poor water pressure. You will be entitled to the payment if the pressure falls below 7 metres static head on two occasions, each of not less than one hour, within a 28-day period. The pressure is measured at the end of our pipe, which is usually at the boundary between the public highway and your property.

Where it is practical for us to identify that you have been affected we will make the payment automatically. In other circumstances you may submit a claim for the payment within three months of the date of the second period of low pressure. We will make only one such payment in any year. Please note that this guarantee does not apply if the low pressure is caused by work we have to do to the water supply network.

### Interruptions to supply

We aim to deliver a constant supply of water, but some circumstances will interrupt the flow and pressure; for example, bursts in mains or if pumps or their electricity supplies fail. In such circumstances, we cannot warn you first, but we will try to keep you informed. If you have a problem, please contact us on **0845 9200 800**.

We sometimes have to interrupt your water supply to mend leaks, connect new customers or make improvements. We will aim to give you notice of all interruptions. For a planned interruption which is going to last more than four hours we will give you 48 hours' notice in writing. We will aim to restore the water supply within the time we tell you. If we do not achieve this, we will automatically pay our household customers £20 under our Customer Guarantee Scheme.

As part of our programme to check for leaks, we sometimes turn off sections of the water main in a planned way. During the day, these interruptions are very brief (as little as 10 minutes), but during the night they may be longer. As the disruption is only slight, we will not tell you first. Customers who are inconvenienced by short interruptions, due to leak detection work, should contact us.

If there is an unplanned interruption when, for example, a water main bursts, we will put your water supply back on within 12 hours of knowing about the problem. If a larger 'strategic' main bursts, we guarantee to restore your water supply within 48 hours. We will tell you when your supply will be restored as soon as we can.

If we fail to meet these targets, we will automatically pay our household customers £20 under our Customer Guarantee Scheme. For each extra 24-hour period that you have no water, we will pay an additional £10 to household customers. If we do not make a payment automatically, because we were unaware that you were affected, you can claim the payment by contacting us at our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800** or write to us at the address at the back of this brochure.

We will arrange for an alternative supply, such as by water tanker or standpipe, if we cannot put your supply back on within 6 hours of the interruption.

### New connections to the water mains

You will have to pay the cost of any new connection to the main. These costs include:

- making the connection and any necessary inspections
- laying our part of the service pipe and installing the stopvalve and meter
- a fixed payment towards our overall costs of making sure that our water supply system can cope with the extra load of making more water supplies available. This is called the Infrastructure Charge. Visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) or contact us on **0845 9200 800** for a leaflet.

For a new connection, contact us on **0845 9200 800** for an application form. We will inspect the site as soon as possible and send you a quotation, telling you what you need to do before we will make the connection.

This will normally include:

- laying your part of the service pipe to our specification
- paying all our costs

- providing a separate service pipe to each part of a building that is separately occupied
- making sure your supply and plumbing comply with the Water Supply and Fittings Regulations 1999
- getting any necessary permission from landowners.

Once we have confirmed that you have done all the above, we must connect the service pipe to the mains within 21 days.

When a supply to a new or converted property is provided, we require a water meter to be fitted, so we can charge on the usage made of the services we provide. There is more information about water meters in section 4.

If you do not agree with all of our requirements, Ofwat (and in some cases an arbitrator) has powers to settle some disputes. Further details are in section 9.

### New mains

There may be no water main nearby which we can use to supply your property. However, if you (on your own or together with your neighbours) ask for a new main to supply several properties, we will provide it if possible. This is known as a 'Requisition'.

You and any other applicants will need to pay for this. This can be done either by a single advance payment or by agreeing to pay annual payments over a 12-year period. The way we charge for this is regulated by statute and involves a number of different factors. We will be happy to give you full details on request. If there is a dispute about the charge, either party can refer the dispute to Ofwat.

For our part, we will provide the main within three months of your agreement. If we fail to meet this deadline and you suffer loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If the time limit needs to be extended, but we cannot agree on how long, either party can refer the dispute to Ofwat. Your local authority can also requisition a main for you and your neighbours.

### Responsibility for pipework

#### Our pipes

We are normally responsible for the water main in the road to the boundary of the property. There is usually an underground stopvalve and sometimes a meter that is also ours. See the following diagram for a typical pipework layout.

There are large numbers of variations to this standard layout. For example, there are special differences in

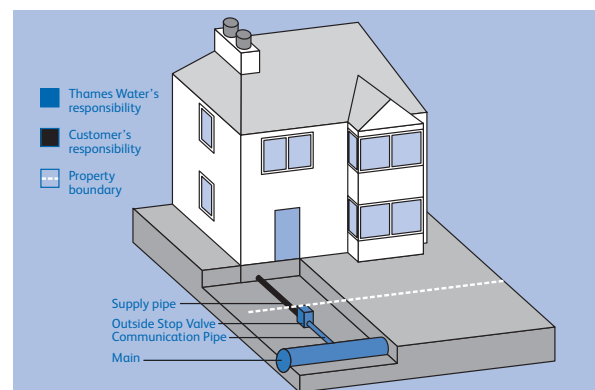
London, but we can determine who is responsible for the different parts of the pipework if necessary.

We are responsible for keeping our meters and apparatus in good repair. However, you may have to pay the reasonable costs of repair if you or your contractor damages these fittings.

### Your pipes

The rest of the pipework taking the water into your property is yours or your landlord's. This is your supply pipe (see diagram). It is your responsibility to maintain this pipe, stopping leaks and mending it when it bursts - just as you would maintain the plumbing inside your property. It is still your responsibility if it runs under other properties before reaching yours. If a shared supply pipe serves your property and your neighbours', then all who share this pipe are responsible for it. The internal stopvalve, where you can turn off your water in an emergency or to undertake renovations, is also your responsibility.

### Diagram showing a typical pipework layout



### Leaks

Leaking pipes are a problem for all water companies and we are committed to improving services by finding and repairing leaks. We are responsible for around 32,000 kilometres of underground pipes and we are constantly repairing leaks and strengthening our pipework to reduce overall leakage levels.

Sometimes, during the course of our water main checks, we also find leaks on customers' supply pipes. If your supply pipe is leaking, you are responsible for repairing it. We will inform you of the leak and advise what needs to be done. To help domestic customers look after their pipes we offer a subsidy towards the remedial work, subject to certain terms and conditions. Please contact us on **0845 9200 800** for further advice.

A leak can sometimes be a danger to people or property; for example, through flooding or freezing.

If we find such problems, we may cut off the supply until the leak is repaired.

If you have a meter, the longer you leave a leak running the more you may have to pay for the wasted water. We have a Code of Practice on Leakage for metered household customers which sets out our policies on leakage.

You can ask for a free copy of the Code of Practice Leaflet 'When your metered water supply has a leak' by calling **0845 9200 800**.

Also, remember that if you spot a leak in the street, we need to know about it so that we can fix it.

You can help by calling our Thames Water Leakline on **0800 714614** to report any leaks from our pipes and apparatus.

If you have a leak or burst pipe in your home call our 24 hour Helpline on **0845 9200 800**. We will then put you in touch with a reputable local plumber who can help you. Please note that you will have to pay a call-out charge and any other charges for work that you ask the plumber to do. We can also recommend the insurance scheme provided by Homeserve. Homeserve is not a Thames Water company but it is a company that we work with and are able to endorse. Telephone **0800 783 3344** for more information.

### Lead

Before the late 1970s, lead pipes were often used to take water from the water main in the street and into a house. If your house was built or has been modernised since then, the pipes will probably be of copper or plastic.

Lead, when dissolved, has been identified as harmful to health particularly for young children and the very old. Hard water does not tend to dissolve lead from the pipes and the hardness of our water supplies means that the pipes become coated with limescale, so the water does not come into direct contact with the lead.

Nevertheless, if you replace your part of the lead service pipe, we may replace the lead parts of the pipe that belong to us, free of charge. This will depend upon the levels of lead in your supply. We will take a sample of the water first to determine whether concentrations of lead in your supply are a cause for concern.

If you have a lead supply pipe that you share and you or your neighbours agree to have it replaced, we will

normally ask you to lay separate pipes.

### Shared service pipes

If you are buying a property, check whether it has a shared service pipe. Shared service pipes are normally only found in older properties where builders have put in one pipe to serve more than one property. When they were first fitted most shared pipes were not usually a problem as people did not have so many household appliances like washing machines, dishwashers and central heating systems fed straight from the mains. However, as these appliances have become more common, shared pipes have caused some difficulties.

If you do share a service pipe with one or more of your neighbours, you may find that the flow of water at your tap is low when you and your neighbours are using water. This may happen even though the pressure of water in our main is at normal levels - it just means that not enough water can get through the service pipe to meet the needs of both you and your neighbours at the same time.

If your shared pipe is leaking, you and your neighbours will normally have to share the cost of replacing it with separate pipes. This will usually improve both the flow and pressure of water at your tap.

We may also ask you to lay separate pipes if:

- the shared pipe is defective and needs replacing
- the properties are converted into a larger number of flats or homes
- the shared pipe has been interfered with or we believe this is likely
- the shared pipe no longer meets your needs.

Owat has the power to determine some disputes that may arise if we require a separate service pipe to be fitted.

### Electrical earthing

In order to provide protection against electric shock and fire, all electrical installations must have an effective electrical earth. This is your responsibility. Prior to 1967, it was common practice for the incoming water pipe to be used for this purpose. Since 1967, the incoming water pipe has not been considered an adequate earth and an alternative earthing method must be used in properties built since then. Unfortunately, some properties still rely on the water pipe as an earth.

Like most water companies, we now fit plastic water pipes that do not provide an electrical earth. When we

do this we have, for many years, been advising those householders who may be affected to check that their electrical installations have adequate earthing.

The use of plastic water pipes is increasing.

If you have any doubts over the safety of your electrical installation, particularly if it was installed before 1967, you should contact your electricity company or a qualified electrician.

#### **Preventing damage to pipes**

Water pipes and fittings should be adequately protected from damage.

The most common cause of damage is freezing.

To prevent this happening, any pipe in an unheated area (for example, in the loft or beneath floorboards) or laid externally (to a garden tap or similar) should be insulated.

Pipes should also be securely supported where running along walls or joists, to prevent movement that may cause the pipe-joints to fail.

## 3. Wastewater treatment services

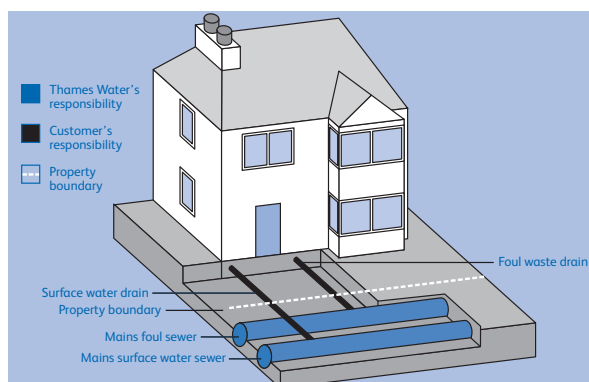
We are required to provide and maintain a system of public sewers that takes the wastewater from your private drains and sewers to our treatment works.

We provide the service directly for the whole of the Thames Water region. Visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) for more information about our wastewater services, or contact us on **0845 9200 800**.

### Responsibility for drains and sewers

The following diagram for a typical layout of drains and sewers shows customer and Company responsibility for drains and sewers. If you have a problem with your private drains and sewers, you may need to get specialised help from a contractor – for example, to clear a blocked drain. If you contact us on **0845 9200 800** we will be able to give you advice about the Homeserve helpline, where you can arrange for a reputable local contractor to help you. Please note that you will have to pay a call-out charge and any other charges for work that you may ask the contractor to do. Homeserve is not a Thames Water company but it is a company that we work with and are able to endorse.

### Diagram showing customer and company responsibility for sewers and drains



### Drains

The drains that carry your household's wastewater are your responsibility to maintain. A drain will generally be found on your property and may run under the public footway and highway, up to the point where it connects with our public sewer. In some circumstances, our public sewer may be in your back or front garden. In this case, only the drains that connect to this sewer are your responsibility. In other cases, the public sewer may be some distance from your house.

### Types of sewers

There are various types of sewers:

- surface water sewers carry rainwater that runs off roofs, some roads and other hard surfaces. Wastewater services charges include an element covering the disposal of surface water (rainwater) from customers' properties. Most properties are connected to our sewers for this purpose. But some properties, mainly in rural areas, are not connected and have other arrangements such as direct discharge to watercourses or special 'soakaways'. If surface water from your property does not drain to our sewers, you do not have to pay for this service. Please refer to section 4 'Charges and bills' for more information
- foul sewers carry water that has been used for cooking and washing, and the waste from lavatories and trade premises to wastewater treatment works
- combined sewers carry both types of wastewater (foul and surface water) to treatment works.

In most cases, our sewers are in roads or public open spaces. In certain circumstances, our sewers may run through private land. In this case, we have the right to enter private land to maintain and repair our sewers. We will comply with our Code of Practice 'Pipelining powers on private land'. This can be obtained by contacting us on **0845 9200 800**.

Special provisions may apply if you propose to build either over or close to a public sewer. Full details can be provided upon request by calling us on **0845 9200 800**.

We keep records showing the approximate position of known public sewers and you have a right to see our records. These records are constantly updated. To see them, visit your local council office who keep copies or contact our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800**.

### Unadopted sewers

There are some sewers in our area that we do not own. These sewers are known as 'unadopted sewers' or 'private sewers'. This means that when they were built, either the owner or developer did not want them to become public sewers or that they did not meet the standards required for them to form part of the public wastewater system. They have since remained privately owned, usually by the owners of the houses they serve or the developer.

You can apply to us to adopt a private sewer so that we, rather than you, become responsible for it. However, it must comply with a number of criteria set out in the Water Industry Act 1991 before we will

adopt it. You can appeal to Ofwat if you think we have unreasonably refused to adopt a sewer. The criteria are set out in 'Sewers for Adoption – a design and construction guide for developers'.

If you are buying a property, ask your solicitor to enquire whether or not a public sewer is recorded as being on the property or near it and if you are connected to the wastewater system.

#### **Our response to blocked and collapsed sewers**

Each year, many thousands of drains and sewers become blocked, due to household waste being flushed away rather than correctly disposed of. Items like nappies, anti-bacteria wipes, sanitary products, tights and cotton buds should be disposed of by wrapping them in a bag and putting them in a bin. Cooking fat also causes huge problems as it cools and hardens in drains and sewers. Cooking fat should be allowed to cool, wrapped in a bag and disposed of appropriately. Blocked sewers can lead to wastewater flooding into properties and rivers and fat can make wastewater treatment more difficult.

More information can be found on our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) or by calling **0845 9200 800** and asking for our leaflet 'Bag it and Bin it'. This leaflet offers advice on how to dispose of waste products safely.

If one of our sewers is blocked or a pumping station breaks down and this disrupts our service or threatens to flood properties, we will send a team to the site as quickly as possible. We will try to start work to clear the blockage within four hours of receiving a call.

#### **Flooding from sewers**

Fortunately, very few of our customers will ever experience wastewater flooding. We know that flooding is an unpleasant and distressing experience. We are committed to reducing the risk of wastewater flooding and to offering help if flooding occurs.

We believe property owners should know whether their property is at risk of flooding. We strongly advise you to investigate the risk to your property and find out if you need insurance against this risk, even if it is remote. We can tell you if your property is at risk and we will try to help by calling us on **0845 9200 800**.

Although we do not accept liability for wastewater flooding, we look at claims individually. Subject to some limited exceptions, customers whose buildings have suffered internal flooding will, as a matter of course, receive a clean up service, a letter confirming

what action is to be taken and a Customer Guarantee Scheme payment equivalent to the annual wastewater charges up to a maximum of £1,000. Please ask for our leaflet 'Our Guarantees to You' for further details.

Unfortunately, some properties suffer repeated incidents of internal flooding, but we are unable to offer any short-term solution. In recognition of these cases, we maintain a 'special list' so that we can regularly monitor the situation. For these properties we will make a payment of £500 on each occasion and offer a full clean-up service.

Where there is external flooding only, and flooding does not enter a property, but causes damage, financial loss or serious loss of amenity, customers can claim a single payment, equal to half their annual wastewater charges up to a maximum of £500, within the financial year.

We publish an advisory leaflet entitled 'Wastewater Flooding – Household Customer Guidelines'. Please telephone our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800** if you would like a copy sent to you. CCWater also publish a leaflet on flooding. If you would like a copy, telephone CCWater on **0845 758 1658**.

#### **New connections to sewers**

You can connect your drain or sewer to our sewers, as long as it is practicable to do so and you pay all costs. You will need to give us details of the drain or sewer to be connected and how the connection will be made. We will then let you know within 14 days whether we accept your proposals and tell you what the costs will be. We can refuse permission if we think the connection will harm our sewers. For example, we will not allow a foul drain connection to a surface water sewer. If you do not agree with our decision, you can appeal to Ofwat.

You can either ask us to undertake the work and we will supply you with a quote, or you make your own arrangements. If you or your contractor makes the connection, you will need the local Highway Authority's permission for any work that needs to be carried out in the street.

In any event you will have to pay the following charges to us:

- a charge for our inspection of the work if you or your contractor makes the connection, or the quoted amount if we make the connection for you

- a fixed payment towards the costs of making sure the overall wastewater treatment system can cope with the extra load. This is called the Infrastructure Charge.

If we agree your connection, and once you have paid the charges, you must give us prior notice of the day you or your builder will do the work (usually we will require at least 14 days notice). Then we can arrange to inspect the connection to make sure it meets our standards.

### **New sewers**

Sometimes a new sewer may be required because there is no public sewer available to serve your property. Ask for our pack on first time wastewater connections by calling **0845 9200 800**.

### **Sewer requisitions**

We can be asked to provide a new sewer to serve several properties. This is known as a Requisition. A notice requiring the sewer can be served on us by:

- you, on your own
- you and your neighbours
- your local authority, on your behalf.

Whoever the applicant, there will be costs that need to be met. This can be done either by a single advance payment or by agreeing to pay annual payments over a 12-year period. The way we charge for this is regulated by statute. We will be happy to give you full details on request. If there is a dispute about the charge either party can refer it to Ofwat.

If practical, we must provide the sewer within six months of your agreement. If we fail to meet this deadline and you suffer loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If the time limit needs to be extended but we cannot agree on how long, either of us can refer the dispute to arbitration (see section 9).

### **Requisition of a lateral drain**

Property owners may also require us to provide a lateral drain from the public sewer to the boundary of the property. The applicant will have to pay the reasonable cost. If there is a dispute about the cost either party can refer the dispute to Ofwat.

### **Section 101A Water Industry Act 1991**

Part of the Environment Act 1995 adds new responsibilities to those already in the Water Industry Act 1991. It means that we may be required to provide a new sewer if the existing local private drainage system causes significant environmental or amenity problems and the provision of mains drainage

is the most appropriate solution. There is no obligation upon us to do this if there is another satisfactory way of fixing the problem.

The sort of problems which might exist include:

- faulty cesspits or septic tanks
- pollution of a ditch, stream or river
- smell.

We will assess the situation in the area of any problems if we are asked to do so. A special pack has been prepared by the Environment Agency (EA) so that local residents can make an application.

If we reject an application and you disagree with our decision, you can appeal to the EA.

### **Wastewater treatment**

The treated wastewater discharged from our treatment works must meet legal conditions. The EA checks to make sure that we meet these conditions and puts the results of its samples into a public register. You can arrange to inspect this register by calling **08708 506506**. The high quality of the treated water returned to our rivers has helped to improve and maintain their quality across our region.

## 4. Charges and bills

### Price Reviews

Ofwat currently reviews our prices every five years and sets the level of charges for each year within each five-year cycle. This Periodic Review takes into consideration the operating costs of running our Business, as well as the investment required to maintain and upgrade the water and wastewater infrastructure for the whole of the Thames Water region.

### Who sends your bill

Within the Thames Water region, there are areas where water is supplied by other water companies. The map on page 3 of this booklet shows those areas. The general rule is that if Thames Water supplies your water, we will bill you directly. However, if water is supplied from another company, they will bill you and may also include the charges for our wastewater service. They will then pass the wastewater payment to us.

### Who is liable for our charges

If you use our services, you must expect to pay for them. The occupier of a property is liable for the charges due, unless we have an agreement that says otherwise. For example, we may have an agreement with the landlord that he is responsible for the charges. In this case the bill is issued in the landlord's name. We do not get involved in disputes between landlords and tenants over responsibility to pay, so we will normally bill the occupier of the property if we have any difficulty in collecting charges due.

If we are unable to establish the name of the occupier of the property, we will deem the owner responsible for the charges. Only if the owner completes, signs and returns an empty property disclaimer form, confirming that the property is empty, unfurnished and not undergoing renovations, will the owner not be liable for our charges.

### What we charge you for

We try to ensure that your water bill is easy to understand. On the front of your bill you will find a summary of the key information that you need. However, if you do have a query, then you will find further explanation on the back (large print and Braille bills contain all this information on separate pages). This should answer most of your questions about how your bill is worked out and how to pay.

If you should have further queries you can telephone our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 888** and speak

with a Customer Services representative Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 8am to 1pm.

In general your supply is either:

- unmetered – based on the chargeable value (also known as the rateable value) of the property or
- metered – based on the amount of water you use, as measured by a meter.

Currently, we charge separately for water and wastewater services. The charge for each service has two parts: a 'fixed charge' and a 'variable charge'. The fixed charge covers some of our costs that do not change with the amount of water you take or the wastewater we treat. The chargeable value 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.

### Surface water drainage

Wastewater services charges include an element covering the disposal of surface water (rainwater) from your property. Most properties are connected to our sewers for this purpose but some, mainly in very rural areas, are not connected and have other arrangements, such as direct discharge to watercourses or special 'soakaways'.

If you believe that surface water from your property does not drain to Thames Water's sewers, ring our Customer Centre to apply for a yearly reduction on your bill. As at 1 April 2007 this is £18.00 but this amount changes each year. You will need to tell us what the drainage arrangements are for your property. We will then check our records or visit your property and tell you whether you are eligible for a reduction in your bill.

### Unmetered bills

If you do not have a water meter, then our charge is based on the chargeable value of your property. The chargeable value was used by local councils to calculate council charges, which before 1974 also included water services. Whilst the local authorities rating system was abolished in 1990, chargeable value still remains valid for calculating water services charges for customers who do not have a meter fitted to their property. To arrive at the total, we multiply the chargeable value by the 'rate per pound' for water and wastewater services.

If your water supply is unmetered, you can choose to pay:

- for the whole year in advance on 1 April
- in two equal payments, payable by 1 April and 1 October

- in monthly instalments, payable from 1 April and monthly thereafter. If you wish to pay this way please make arrangements with us first.

We also offer more flexible ways of paying bills, such as by fortnightly/weekly instalments for consumers on fixed/low incomes or by direct payments from any benefits paid by Job Centre Plus. Telephone our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 888** for more information.

### Metered bills

If your property has a water meter, we charge you on the amount of water used, plus a fixed charge. The wastewater services part of the bill is also based on the water recorded by the meter. We aim to ensure that all our metered household customers receive at least one bill per year based on an actual meter reading rather than on an estimate.

We will adjust your bill for estimates that are too high or too low when we next read your meter. Alternatively, if we send you an estimated bill, you could read the meter yourself and provide us with your reading. We would then be happy to send you a revised bill.

If your meter reading is higher than usual and you feel you have used no more water than normal, you may have a leak. We are responsible if the leak is on the meter itself, and legally you are responsible for repairing leaks on the supply pipe (see section 'Responsibility for pipework' on page 8). If you think you have a leak on your supply pipe, contact us on **0845 9200 800** so we can offer you advice and help you repair the leak.

If there is a leak we will adjust your charges – as long as it is repaired straight away, was not caused by your negligence and was not one you should have known about and could have repaired sooner. We will not adjust your water charges for any future leaks, but you may be entitled to an adjustment of your wastewater charges. If we do adjust your water supply charges, we will also adjust the wastewater charges.

### Metered payment plan

If you have a water meter, we offer a special payment plan so that you do not have to pay your water bill in one go as soon as it is received. To arrange a payment plan, just fill in and return the Direct Debit form which is attached to your bill or contact us on **0845 9200 888**.

You can still have a payment plan even if you do not have a bank or building society account. Please telephone us on **0845 9200 888** to arrange this.

Once we have received your request, we will set up your payment plan and let you know in advance what your regular payments will be.

We keep a record of how much water you use from the readings we take from your meter. We use this information to calculate your payment plan instalments. We will estimate how much water you will use in the coming year, add an amount that allows for inflation, and then divide the total into the agreed instalment amounts.

We will review your payment plan annually. These reviews help us to make sure your regular instalments are accurate, spread out equally and paid promptly. Call us on **0845 9200 888** if you would like more information about payment plans.

### WaterSure Scheme (Vulnerable Customer Tariff)

If you have a water meter at your property, with your bills based on the amount of water you use, and you are within the category of customer that the Government has defined as 'vulnerable', you may be able to reduce your bill. Under this tariff you will pay either your metered bill or a 'daily average charge', which is set each financial year (£271 for 2007/08), whichever is lower.

Households that may be eligible for this tariff are those in receipt of specific means-tested state benefits and who either, have a large family (with at least three dependant children under the age of 19 and for whom child benefit is being received) or have a member of the same household who has a medical condition that requires the use of extra water. Eligible customers need to re-apply on an annual basis.

More information can be found on our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk), where you can download the 'Vulnerable Groups Tariff (WaterSure Scheme)' information leaflet, or contact us on **0845 9200 888** and ask for a copy.

### Optional Water Metering Scheme

Under this scheme many household consumers have decided to take advantage of their right to have a water meter installed free of charge. This means that they pay for the amount of water used plus a fixed charge. If you have an unmetered water supply, you may find it less expensive to pay for the water you use, rather than have your charges based on the chargeable value of your property.

If you opt for a free meter but decide you want to go back to an unmetered basis of charge, you must request this within the first year of having the meter (or within one month of receiving your second metered bill, whichever is the later). However, subsequent occupiers will not have the option to revert to the chargeable value of the property and will be charged on a metered basis.

Our preferred location for the meter is by your outside stopvalve, but we may install the meter internally if there is no suitable alternative. This installation is free. If you decide that you would like the meter fitted in a different location to the one we choose, and this would be more expensive, we will ask you to pay the difference in cost.

Once we have your completed application form, we aim to fit the meter within three calendar months. There can be problems with fitting a meter, especially if there is a common supply involved (see 'Shared Service Pipes' on page 9) or if the property is a flat. If we cannot install a meter at your property we will let you know what the alternatives are – for example, paying according to the Average Household Charge (see section 'Average Household Charge' on page 16).

### Compulsory Water Metering

Over the last 50 years, demand for water has doubled in the UK. Thames Water is committed to effective management of supply and demand through supporting various activities from water efficiency measures to monitoring usage through the installation of meters.

There are specific circumstances where we have the legal right to compulsorily fit a meter at a domestic property. These specific circumstances include:

- all new properties built after 1989
- properties where sprinklers, swimming pools and high water using equipment, for example power showers, are used
- properties where there is a change in occupation.

Our policy is to fit a water meter at every property where a garden sprinkler or swimming pool is used. This is because they use a large amount of extra water (the average sprinkler uses 540 litres of water per hour, equivalent to the amount used by a family of four in one day) and normal water bills do not cover the cost of such use. If you use a garden sprinkler or swimming pool, please let us know so that we can arrange installation of a water meter.

We also have a legal right to meter properties where there is a change in occupation. For more information, visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk).

The benefit of having a water meter is that customers pay for, and are able to monitor, the amount of water actually used.

### Common Billing

A Common Billing Agreement is available for customers in properties where we cannot meter each property separately, for example a group of flats that share a common water supply pipe. In such cases, a single landlord, freeholder, managing agent or other person or body (known as the 'consumer') may accept responsibility for a single bill, which is the combined charge for all the properties supplied by the shared pipe. However, we do not implement this arrangement unless each occupier agrees and confirms their acceptance in writing.

Once written agreement has been received from all parties we will fit a water meter on the shared supply pipe and send one bill for all properties to the consumer. The consumer will then pay us the water and wastewater charges for each individual customer. In all such cases it would be necessary for each individual customer to agree their own payment arrangements with the consumer. The charges that the consumer may pass on to each customer may be limited under the Water Resale Order. For details about the provisions of the Water Resale Order, visit the Ofwat website at [www.ofwat.gov.uk](http://www.ofwat.gov.uk)

Further information about the Common Billing Agreement can be obtained by contacting us on **0845 9200 888**.

### Average Household Charge

The Average Household Charge is available to household consumers, who have asked us to fit a meter, but where it is not practical or too expensive to do so. Under this scheme you will pay the equivalent of the Average Household Charge for metered customers (for 2007/08 this is £245). For details contact us on **0845 9200 888**.

### Meter testing

All water meters are approved for accuracy by manufacturers and trading standards officers before leaving the factory. Water meters are extremely reliable, but if you think your meter is not accurate, you can ask us to test it. Normally, meter readings are higher than expected because more water has been used during that period or there is a leak on the pipework (see section 'Leaks' on page 8).

We normally offer one free check. At the same time we check for any leaks. We can also carry out formal tests using a specially calibrated meter together with the existing one.

Either Thames Water can test your meter, or an independent company can carry out full weights and measures testing off-site. Please telephone **0845 9200 888** for the respective charges. We will only make a charge if your meter is found to be accurate. Please write to the address on your bill if you want us to carry out a test.

We can also decide to test your meter. Where a test shows that the meter has been giving the wrong measurements, we can increase or reduce your latest bill as necessary. We will base any adjustments on how much water you have used in the past when the meter was working correctly. You will get a copy of the test results.

### Tampering with meters

It is a criminal offence to tamper with a water meter. The water meter remains the property of Thames Water.

### Ways to pay

Whether your water is metered or not, you have a choice of several different ways of paying your bill. All these services are free unless otherwise stated:

- if you have a current account, you can pay by Direct Debit (protected by the Direct Debit Guarantee) or by Standing Order
- at a bank – if you pay at your own bank or a branch of the National Westminster Bank, this service is free of charge
- by post – send your cheque to **Thames Water Utilities Ltd, PO Box 234, Swindon, SN38 3TW**
- in cash at a post office – a small fee will be charged if you ask for a payment book, but the service is free if you ask us for a payment card
- at a PayPoint facility displaying the paypoint symbol
- by debit and credit cards by telephoning us on **0845 9200 888**
- on-line through the Alliance & Leicester Bill Pay facility at [www.billpayment.co.uk](http://www.billpayment.co.uk) using your debit card and quoting your Thames Water account number
- on-line through home banking – you will need to have your Thames Water account number available (you can find this in the top right hand corner of the bill) and quote account 00286125, sort code 57-27-53.

### Advice if you have difficulty paying

If you have difficulty paying your water bill, please let us know as soon as possible. We want to help and, although we cannot reduce your bill, we may be able to make special payment arrangements to suit your circumstances.

If you want to know more about how we recover unpaid charges, refer to our leaflet 'How to get help if you can't pay your bill', included in the back pocket of this booklet. This leaflet has information that can help you, but if you are having trouble paying your water bill the best thing to do is to talk to us directly. We will discuss your situation with you and arrange something that suits both you and us.

If you want more details of the ways we charge you for water supply and wastewater services, please contact us on **0845 9200 888** and ask for a copy of our charges schemes leaflets and our latest tariffs.

### Moving house

If you are going to move house and you have a metered supply, please let us know as soon as you can. We would prefer four weeks notice of your move date so we can arrange to read your meter and send you a final bill. 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 telephone us on **0845 9200 888** 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 metered water supply, you will have to pay the metered charges. You cannot change to an unmetered basis of charge.

We do have a legal right to meter properties where there is a change in occupation. For more information visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk).

## 5. Customers requiring additional assistance

We always aim to offer our customers the most helpful and convenient service possible. For customers who are elderly, disabled or who need extra help, we offer a range of additional services at no extra charge.

Our close links with a number of specialist charities, such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, help us tailor services to customers requiring additional assistance. These services include:

- large print
- Braille (grades 1 & 2)
- 'talking bill' and audio tape services for blind customers who do not use Braille and other customers with reading difficulties
- email service for screen reading software users
- textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing customers
- fax and Tynetalk facilities for deaf and hard of hearing customers
- sign language interpreter service (BSL and SSE) if we should ever need to visit a deaf customer who uses sign language
- additional help and advice for home dialysis customers
- a customer password scheme to deter bogus callers at the door
- an arrangement for customers to nominate someone else to deal with their bills for them
- Language Line for customers whose first language is not English.

If you want to know more about these services, please telephone our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800** and ask for our leaflet about 'Services for customers requiring additional assistance'. For customers who are deaf or hard of hearing, who use a textphone, our textphone number is **0845 7200 898**.

## 6. Access to private property

Sometimes we need to gain access to private premises for a variety of reasons. For example, to investigate a leak, read the meter, test the quality of the water at the taps, check for faulty drainage connections or check that Regulations are being met.

We can lay pipes and carry out works on private land, but we will always give reasonable advance notice of such works and talk to the owner and occupier. We will also provide a copy of our Code of Practice 'Pipelaying powers on private land', which sets out what we will do to protect the property and ensure safety. If you would like a copy please visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) or telephone us on **0845 9200 800**.

### **Beware of Bogus Callers – If unsure, don't open the door**

A genuine caller will always carry an identity card and will automatically show it to you. Often a genuine caller will be wearing a uniform and have a car or van nearby displaying the company's sign or logo.

If you are unsure, a genuine caller will always be happy to wait outside whilst you contact us on **0845 9200 800** (textphone users **0845 7200 898**) to confirm who they are. **Never let them wait inside.** Remember that there are very few reasons why our representatives should need to enter your home, apart from reading the meter if you have one inside your property or taking water samples as part of our regular monitoring programme. In many cases we will have made an appointment with you before calling round.

One of our special services, available to all, gives the opportunity to choose and register a special password that only our authorised representatives will know. If you want to know more about our Password Scheme visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk), where you can download a copy of the leaflet 'Beware Bogus Callers', or telephone **0845 9200 800** (textphone users **0845 7200 898**) and ask for a copy.

## 7. Our guarantees to you

By law we must offer certain standards of service to all our customers and, if we do not meet these standards, guarantee that we will make a payment. In most cases this payment is made automatically. The basic legal requirement is the Guaranteed Standards Scheme. However, in some cases we have chosen to enhance the guarantees. These enhancements in combination with the Guaranteed Standards Scheme form our Customer Guarantee Scheme.

We are committed to providing a high quality service to all our customers and our Customer Guarantee Scheme is constantly reviewed to ensure we continually improve the quality of customer service provided.

Our guarantees include:

- keeping appointments
- answering queries about your bill
- responding to complaints in writing
- interrupting and restoring your water supply
- flooding from sewers
- problems with water pressure.

A more detailed explanation of these guarantees can be found on our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) and in our leaflet 'Our Guarantees to You'. A copy is enclosed with this booklet, and you can get more copies from our Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800**. We may not make a payment if we do not meet a specified standard because of circumstances beyond our reasonable control. Such circumstances could include: extreme weather conditions, power failures, strikes, or the action of third parties. Also, in the case of a major burst main, there might be exceptional circumstances where it would be unreasonable for us to restore the supply within the given time.

Payments made under this scheme do not affect any legal rights you may have to take action for any loss or damage you suffer. Also, these payments do not mean we admit liability.

### How to make a claim

We hope you will never need to make a claim. However, if you do need to make a claim under our Customer Guarantee Scheme this must be made, in writing, within three months of the event. Please write to:

**Thames Water  
Customer Services (Guarantee Scheme)  
PO Box 436  
Swindon  
SN38 1TU**

### Disputes about eligibility for a Guarantee Scheme Payment

If you feel we have acted unfairly by denying a payment under the Customer Guarantee Scheme, you can ask Ofwat, who is the independent Regulator for the water industry, to consider your claim. If you want to do this write to:

**Ofwat  
Centre City Tower  
7 Hill Street  
Birmingham  
B5 4UA**

## 8. Complaints procedure

We hope that you will not have cause to complain about our services. If you do, please call or write to us in the first instance. We have a leaflet called 'Our Quality Promise'. This leaflet details the main steps that must be taken to get your complaint reviewed. If you would like a copy please call us on 0845 9200 800.

Please note that to help us deal effectively with your complaint we may have to pass some of your customer information on to other members of staff, or contractors who work on our behalf, so that your concerns can be fully resolved.

### How to get your complaint dealt with by telephone

If your complaint is regarding your bill call our Customer Centre on: **0845 9200 888** (textphone **0845 7200 899**)

If your complaint is about any other matter, like burst mains, other emergencies or other operational problems such as road works or water quality – call us on **0845 9200 800** (textphone **0845 7200 898**)

### By letter or email

Send your complaint letter:  
By post to

**Thames Water Utilities Ltd**  
**PO Box 436**  
**Swindon**  
**SN38 1TU**

By email to  
**customer.feedback@thameswater.co.uk**

### By personal visit

You can make a personal visit. For example, visiting our Customer Centre (accessible to disabled customers) at Kembrey Park, Swindon, Wiltshire, during normal office hours (Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm). We suggest that you telephone first on the appropriate number, shown above, to make an appointment as this will enable us to deal with your complaint more efficiently, ensuring the right staff are available to address your concerns.

### Customers requiring additional assistance

If you require additional assistance, please mention this when making your complaint. Large print, Braille (grades 1 & 2), 'talking bills', audiotape and email services are available on request for the visually

impaired and customers with reading difficulties. A full textphone and Typetalk service for deaf and hard of hearing customers who use a textphone is available 24 hours a day. Should we ever need to visit a deaf customer who uses sign language we offer sign language interpreters (BSE and SSL).

We can also offer an interpreter service for customers whose first language is not English.

### How quickly we reply

We will reply within 10 working days of receiving your written complaint, this includes contacting us by email or fax. This standard meets the terms of our Customer Guarantee Scheme.

We will try to resolve complaints made by telephone or personal visit on the same day. If we need to write to you we will do so within 10 working days.

### Standards of service

We keep a constant watch on the speed of our replies to customer queries and complaints. Our Customer Relations Manager carries out regular spot checks to ensure quality.

We record all our telephone calls received by our Contact Centre to ensure that we always give you a quality service. Independent auditors also check on our response times. Reports are sent to Ofwat each year so that a comparison can be made of our performance with other water companies.

Ofwat also monitors how often we read water meters. We ensure that your meter bill is as accurate and up to date as possible. Our aim is to ensure that all our household customers who have a metered supply receive at least one bill per year based on an accurate meter reading rather than on an estimate.

We also have to meet the challenge of dealing with more than four million telephone calls every year. To do this, we run a 24 hour operation, 7 days a week, using a telephone network that will allow you to leave information automatically or speak with a Customer Services agent at any point during your call.

### Staff training

All our Customer Services staff receive comprehensive training in customer care and how to help you follow this Complaints Procedure. 'Putting the Customer First' is one of our guiding principles and this is part of the training that our Customer Services staff receive. Please let us know if you ever receive a service that is not efficient and polite.

**Taking your complaint further within Thames Water**

If you have complained to us and you are not satisfied with our response let us know and our Customer Services Director will review your complaint. We give full details of our complaints procedure in our leaflet 'Our Quality Promise'.

**Putting things right**

If we are at fault, we will aim to correct any aspect of our service that has been unsatisfactory and has failed to meet either the terms or the spirit of our Customer Code of Practice. In all cases we will explain what has gone wrong, what we are doing about it and how we will try to make sure that it does not happen again. We will also apologise for any inconvenience we may have caused you.

Sometimes your complaint will be about matters that are not our responsibility, or is made because you do not realise the extent of our duties. In those cases we will always explain how far we are involved and can help, and, if we can, we will give advice on how you can get help elsewhere. Our Customer Guarantee Scheme sets out payments we make when certain parts of our service fail. We make some of these payments automatically without you having to make a written claim.

We also consider making payments for loss or damage that results from problems with our services. If we have made mistakes which have caused you loss or particular hardship or inconvenience, we will consider making discretionary payments to you whether we are legally liable or not. Cases like these will be considered on their individual merits.

**Taking your complaint further outside Thames Water**

If you are still not happy after your complaint has been considered by our Customer Services Department and our Customer Services Director, you can complain to the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater). CCWater is an independent organisation and its services are free. One of its duties is to decide if your complaint has been properly handled and whether further investigation is required. Normally CCWater will only take up your complaint if we have first been given the opportunity to put things right.

The address for the CCWater Thames region is:

**4th Floor South  
High Holborn House  
52-54 High Holborn  
London  
WC1V 6RL  
Telephone: 0845 758 1658**

If CCWater cannot solve the complaint, is not happy with our response to its findings, or you are not happy with the response, you can refer the complaint to CCWater Head Office at 1st floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B2 4AJ.

There are some cases in which Ofwat can make a decision that is final and binding. These relate to breaches of duty and can be found on the next page under the section 'Arbitration – Determination of disputes by Ofwat'.

## 9. Arbitration

### Determination of disputes by Ofwat

Ofwat can decide certain disputes. When a dispute is sent to Ofwat, their decision is final and binding on both parties. Disputes that may be sent to Ofwat can only be about certain subjects.

The following list summarises what those subjects are:

- entitlement to a free meter under our optional metering scheme
- requisition of water mains, sewers or lateral drains
- connections to water mains (financial requirements)
- disconnection and reconnection charges
- separate service pipes for new or present supplies
- installation of water storage tanks to maintain pressure and supply in some special cases
- conditions for adopting sewers
- connecting to public sewers
- power to close or restrict use of a public sewer
- altering your drainage system
- the Customer Guarantee Scheme, which incorporates Ofwat's Guaranteed Standards Scheme. In most categories, the payments we make, if we do not meet our normal high standards of service, are the same as the Guaranteed Standards Scheme. Copies of our leaflet 'Our Guarantees to You' can be obtained by calling us on **0845 9200 800**.

Ofwat can be contacted at:

**Ofwat**  
**Centre City Tower**  
**7 Hill Street**  
**Birmingham**  
**B5 4UA**  
**Telephone: 0121 625 1300**

### Determination of disputes by the Environment Agency (EA)

Under the Environment Act 1995, the EA can decide disputes when Thames Water has rejected requests for first time sewerage schemes. If the EA is called to make a determination, its decision is final and binding on both parties.

### Determination of disputes by an independent arbitrator

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, some disputes between you and Thames Water can be decided by an independent arbitrator. Hopefully we will agree on who this should be. If we cannot agree, the President of the Institute of Civil Engineers, The Secretary of State for the Environment, or Ofwat (depending on the dispute) will choose one. The disputes that may be sent to

arbitration must be about the following:

- water meter installations, including how the fitting should be done and what materials should be used
- prevention of contamination.

### Customer awareness

In any letter that informs you of our decision on a particular matter, we will also tell you if you have the right to refer the matter to an independent arbitrator or to Ofwat.

In some cases your complaint may be about something that cannot be agreed upon. In such cases, you still have your normal rights to take legal action against us and, of course, you may want to take independent legal advice from your solicitor or Law Centre at any stage.

## 10. Meaning of terms

**Average Household Charge:** an optional charging method where it is not practical or too expensive to fit a meter. This charge is based on the average Thames Water metered water and wastewater services bill household bill.

**Chargeable value:** known previously as the 'rateable value' as set by the valuation offices. Whilst the local authorities rating system was abolished in 1990, the chargeable value still remains valid for calculating water service charges where the water supply is not connected to a meter. Council Tax Bands have no bearing on the chargeable value of a property. In cases where the Council Tax Band is changed, the chargeable value remains the same.

**Common Billing Agreement:** where we cannot meter each property separately, because of a common water supply, a Common Billing Arrangement is available. Once written agreement has been received from all property owners we will fit a water meter on the shared pipe. One bill will be sent for all the properties to the designated representative who will collect the agreed individual payments and make payment to us.

**Consumer:** the person responsible for payment of water service charges.

**Customer:** the person who receives a service from us.

**Fixed charge:** previously known as the 'standing charge'. This charge covers some of the day-to-day costs of maintaining water services and administering customer accounts, which do not change with the amount of water used.

**Infrastructure charge:** the charge made when a new supply is requested. This is a contribution towards the cost of the additional demands on our services and infrastructure.

**Metered supply:** where the water supply has a meter fitted and the consumer is charged according to the actual amount of water used.

**Service pipe:** the pipe supplying water from the water main to a customer's own storage cistern or water fittings, and subject to pressure from our main.

**Sewage:** the contents of the sewers.

**Sewerage:** the system of pipes that carry wastewater

and surface water to our treatment works.

**Stopvalve:** a tap device to turn on/off the water supply from the mains, which can be located internally, externally or both.

**Strategic main:** the main that takes water in bulk to centres of population which have no other supply that can fully meet normal demand.

**Supply pipe:** the section of service pipe that is the responsibility of the customer, either singly or jointly with others. It runs from the boundary of the premises up to the storage cistern or water fittings.

**Surface water drainage:** the disposal of surface water (for example rainwater) from customers' properties.

**Unmetered supply:** where the water supply is not connected to a water meter. The water services charge is based on the chargeable value of the property and not according to the actual amount of water used.

**WaterSure Scheme (Vulnerable Customer Tariff):** for customers who fall within the Government definition as 'vulnerable' and have a metered water supply. Such customers may be able to reduce their bill by paying an 'average charge' which is set each financial year and which may be lower than their normal metered charge.

## 11. Other leaflets available

We have a wide range of leaflets available which focus on most aspects of our service, including some excellent educational material. These can be obtained by telephoning **0845 9200 800**. The following is a list of leaflets referred to in this Code of Practice:

Bag It & Bin It (the sensible disposal of waste products)

Beware – Bogus Callers (including information about our password scheme)

Charges Leaflets (metered and unmetered)

How To Get Help If You Can't Pay Your Bill

Our Guarantees to You (Customer Guarantee Scheme)

Our Quality Promise (our complaints procedure)

Our Code of Practice - Pipelaying Powers on Private Land

Service For Customers Requiring Additional Assistance

Wastewater Flooding - Household Customer Guidelines

Water Regulations (including information about byelaws)

When Your Metered Water Supply Has a Leak

WaterSure Scheme (information about the Government's Vulnerable Customers' Tariff)

## 12. Addresses and telephone numbers

### Thames Water

Online at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk)

You can visit our website to access online account services. Find important information on water and wastewater services, and download a range of publications (select About us, then Download our leaflets)

### By telephone

#### Billing 0845 9200 888

For queries relating to the payment of your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing enquiries, you can use our automated service 24 hours a day, or speak with our Customer Service Team at the following times:

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Saturday 8am to 1pm

At all other times and bank holidays the automated service is available. Alternatively, visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) to access our online services.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and have a minicom, contact us on **0845 7200 899**.

### Water and wastewater emergencies

#### 0845 9200 800

If you have a non billing enquiry that has not been addressed on our website, or you want a leaflet and do not have access to the internet, contact us on **0845 9200 800**.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and have a minicom, contact us on **0845 7200 898**.

### Fax number 01793 424046

Voicemail service for customers' own meter readings  
**0845 300 1131**

By post

**Thames Water**

**PO Box 286**

**Swindon**

**SN38 2RA**

### Other organisations

#### Consumer Council for Water Thames Region

4th Floor South

High Holborn House

52-54 High Holborn

London

WC1V 6RL

Telephone 0845 7581658

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

#### Ofwat

Centre City Tower

7 Hill Street

Birmingham

B5 4UA

Telephone 0121 625 1300

[www.ofwat.gov.uk](http://www.ofwat.gov.uk)

#### The Environment Agency

Kings Meadow House

Kings Meadow Road

Reading

RG1 8DQ

Telephone 0118 953 5000

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

#### The Drinking Water Inspectorate

Ashdown House

123 Victoria Street

London

SW1E 6DE

Telephone 020 7082 8024

[www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)

Our Customer Code of Practice for household customers, along with the leaflets enclosed in the back pocket, provides helpful information and advice.

**More information can be found at:**  
**[www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk)**

# Getting in touch with us

## Online at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk)

You can visit our website to access online account services, find important information on water and wastewater services, and download a range of publications (select About us, then Download our leaflets)

## By telephone

Billing **0845 9200 888**

For enquiries relating to the payment of your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing enquiries, you can use our automated service 24hours a day, speak with our Customer Service Team at the following times:

**Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm**

**Saturday 8am to 1pm**

At all other times and bank holidays the automated service is available. Alternatively, visit our website at [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk) to access our online account services.

Water and Wastewater Emergencies **0845 9200 800**

If you have a non-billing enquiry that has not been addressed on our website, or if you want a leaflet and do not have access to the internet, contact us on **0845 9200 800**.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and have a minicom, contact us on **0845 7200 898**.

## By post

If you prefer, you can write to us at:

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

Visit the Thames Water website on  
[www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk)

This leaflet can be supplied in Braille, large print or audio-tape upon request.