



## **Thames Water and changes to the way tenants pay for water Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. What is changing?**

**A:** If you are a council tenant, the way you pay for water is changing. Currently you pay water charges to us when you pay your rent. The council collects these charges and pays them to Thames Water. This is changing and from April 2020, you will no longer pay the council for water and Thames Water will send a separate water bill to you instead.

### **Q: Why is the way tenants pay for water changing?**

**A:** Thames Water have ended their contract with the council to collect their water charges.

### **Q: Can we carry on as we are without making this change?**

**A:** No. The agreement the council has with Thames Water to collect water charges for them allows either party to end it with six months' notice. Thames Water have told us that they want to make this change and we can't force them to change this decision.

### **Q: Will I be double paying for my water rates for the period 1 April to 6 April 2020?**

**A:** No, you will not. The annual water charge for 2019/20, which covers the period up to and including 31 March 2020 was divided into 53 weekly payments from 1 April 2020 to 5 April 2020. The annual charge for 2020/21, which includes all water usage from 1 April 2020, will be collected by Thames water.

### **Q: What should I do?**

**A:** You don't need to do anything yet, and you should carry on paying your water charges to the council for now. Nothing will change until April 2020. In February we will write to you with the new weekly charge to pay to us which we do every year – the difference this year is that the weekly charge will no longer include water. Thames Water will write to you to confirm your water charge and how to pay.

### **Q: Will Thames Water increase the water charges?**

**A:** Thames Water have always set the water charges, even though you paid water charges to the council. Thames Water have not confirmed the charges for next year yet, but they usually increase by a small amount each April. Water companies are regulated by OFWAT and there are rules they have to follow when they are setting their charges.

### **Q: How do Thames Water charge for water?**

**A:** Currently, most council tenants who pay us their water charges as part of their rent receive a rateable value charge. A small number of tenants receive an assessed household charge or Watersure Plus. Some tenants have water meters but they pay their water charges directly to Thames Water and not to the council.

Rateable value charge - this is a charge loosely based on the value of your home rather than how much water is used.

Assessed household charge - this is a charge based on the number of bedrooms in your home rather than how much water is used. If you live alone there is a separate 'single occupier' charge. The assessed household charge is a charge for tenants who cannot have a water meter fitted, for example because of the type of building you live in.

Watersure Plus - this is a special means tested tariff for customers on incomes below £19,201 (not including any disability benefits). If you are eligible and successfully apply you can have your water charges reduced by up to 50 per cent. Thames Water have said that they are making it easier to apply for Watersure Plus and changing the name of this to WaterHelp.

Water meter - tenants with a water meter are charged for the water that the house uses. Water meters are sometimes useful if water consumption in a household is low. However, not everyone can have a water meter fitted, for example it isn't possible in all council blocks.

If you want to find out more about how you are charged or about changing how you are charged, contact Thames Water on 0800 009 4293 or visit [thameswater.co.uk/yourthames](http://thameswater.co.uk/yourthames).

**Q: I've heard that tenants will be moved onto a rateable value charge when water billing is transferred to Thames Water, which could cost more. Is this true?**

**A:** No. Thames Water have said that when they take over water payments from the council, you will stay on the same charge you are currently on – for example if you are on the assessed household charge you will stay on the assessed household charge.

**Q: What about vulnerable tenants and tenants who struggle with letters?**

**A:** Council staff have good knowledge of tenants who need extra help. We are already working with individual tenants to ensure they are aware of the change in their water billing. We are available to help those who need it and staff will take proactive steps to contact the most vulnerable. We will also check rent accounts closely in April to identify vulnerable tenants who are still making their payments to us.

If you are concerned about a vulnerable tenant and the Thames Water changeover you can refer them to us at [housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk) or on 0800 358 3783.

**Q: How can I reduce my water bills?**

**A:** Thames Water offer WaterSure Plus which is a means tested scheme for tenants on incomes below £19,201 (not including any disability benefits). Thames Water also offers advice on their website about saving water and money at [thameswater.co.uk/be-water-smart](http://thameswater.co.uk/be-water-smart).

**Q: What about leaseholders?**

**A:** The council does not collect water charges for any leaseholders, so leaseholders are not affected by these changes.

**Q: Where can I get more information?**

**A:** You can find out more at [thameswater.co.uk/yourthames](http://thameswater.co.uk/yourthames) or contact Thames Water on 0800 009 4293.

There are details about where to get help with money issues, debt and benefits on the council's website at [westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing/support-and-benefits](http://westminster.gov.uk/yourhousing/support-and-benefits).

You can email [housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@westminster.gov.uk) or call us on 0800 358 3783.

Further information is available on the water regulator OFWAT's website [ofwat.gov.uk](http://ofwat.gov.uk)