

How Southern Water supports vulnerable customers

Executive Summary

We provide a range of **reduced payment options** for customers in vulnerable circumstances:

- **Essentials** provides a discount if water bills are over 3% of disposable household income
- **WaterSure** caps bills when a customer has a water meter and someone in their household receives a means tested benefit and has three or more children under 19 **and / or** has a medical condition which means they need to use additional water
- **Water Direct** allows Jobcentre Plus to pay Southern Water directly from a customer's benefits to help manage bills
- **NewStart** provides help reducing debt for customers who owe money or haven't made a payment for a while

Your constituents may be eligible for more than one financial support scheme, depending on their circumstances.

Our **Priority Services** ensures customers with individual needs can always access water services by tailoring our approach to meet their needs.. This includes providing bills in alternative formats, such as audio, to ensure extra support is available during disruptions.

They are available to customers with limited mobility, disabilities or chronic illnesses, medical conditions, or difficulty seeing, hearing, or communicating. Customers in temporary vulnerable circumstances, such as new parents or those with short-term medical conditions, can also let us know if they need additional support.

Reduced Payment Options

Customers can apply for support by calling us for free on 0800 027 0363, emailing payless@southernwater.co.uk or visiting www.southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill.

If the customer's water bills add up to more than 3% of their household income, or if a customer receives pension credits...

Essentials

Our **Essentials** tariff helps customers who are struggling to pay their water bills by providing a discount of at least 20% on future bills.

Customers who receive both water supply and wastewater services from us will qualify if:

- their annual combined bill represents at least 3% of total household income after tax and housing costs, **or**
- they, and anyone living with them, receive pension credit

Customers who have been accepted on to the financial assistance tariff provided by their water supply company, will automatically qualify for a 20% Essentials tariff discount.

If the customer uses a water meter and someone in the household receives benefits, or has a medical condition which means they need more water...

WaterSure

Your constituents may be eligible to capped charges through **WaterSure** if:

- they, or someone in their household, receive benefits or tax credits **and** they, or someone in their household, is responsible for three or more children under 19 in full time education, **or**
- they, or their child, have a specified medical condition requiring the use of more water.

The capped charges for WaterSure for 2018/19 are £436 for water and wastewater services, £278 for wastewater only and £158 for water only.

If the customer wishes JobCentre Plus to pay a small amount directly from a customer's benefits to manage bills...

Water Direct

If your constituent claims Income Support, Income-Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance Universal Credit, or Pension Credit, Jobcentre Plus may consider paying a small amount directly out of their benefits for bills.

If a customer has at least £50 arrears, Jobcentre Plus will take a fixed amount from their benefits to cover their arrears and current charges. This ensures they don't fall into further debt.

If the customer needs helping paying off debt or hasn't made a payment in a while...

NewStart

Through NewStart we help customers' reduce their arrears by matching payments they make against them under an agreed payment plan. This helps customers reduce water bill debt.

Your constituent will qualify for the **NewStart** scheme if they currently owe Southern Water money and haven't made a payment for a while.

Priority Services

Customers who are elderly or disabled, or who have certain medical conditions, may need additional support. These customers can confidentially register for our **Priority Services** to ensure our staff know about any special circumstances or needs they may have.

Customers can apply at the link below or on 0800 027 0800.

<https://www.southernwater.co.uk/register-for-individual-needs>

Support during supply interruptions

We do everything we can to fix supply interruptions as quickly as possible. However, some customers are in circumstances where even a short interruption can have significant consequences.

Customers on our **Priority Services** register are contacted quickly during a supply interruption and offered additional support. For example, customers on kidney dialysis are immediately provided with supplies of bottled water.

Home visits

Our staff are trained to offer friendly, helpful advice on anything to do with our water or wastewater services. We can arrange for someone to visit your constituents at home at a time agreed with them for advice on water efficiency or how to pay their bills.

Meter reading

If a constituent receives their water supply from us and has difficulty reading the water meter, we can arrange for it to be read regularly and for them to receive details of the readings.

Large print or braille

We can send out bills or correspondence in large print or braille.

Talking bills

We provide a talking bill service. When a bill is produced, we will telephone your constituent to tell them how much it is before posting it. We can also record bills onto CDs.

Bills sent to someone else

We can arrange for your constituent's bill to be sent to someone chosen by them. This may be helpful if they find it difficult to handle, read or understand their bill.

Minicom services and TalkType

If your constituent has hearing or speech difficulties they can use:

- A Minicom service, available on 0330 303 1265 (calls charged at local rate) from 8am–7pm, Monday to Friday, and 8.30am–2pm on Saturday
- TalkType relay service

Bills explained

We've produced a series of short films to explain terms and figures shown on customers' metered, unmetered and assessed bills. They can be found here:

<https://www.southernwater.co.uk/your-bill-explained>