

Thames Water changeover – frequently asked questions

Q. What is changing?

A. The way Camden tenants pay for water is changing. Currently tenants pay water charges to us when they pay rent. The council collects these charges and pays them to Thames Water. This is changing and from April 2019, tenants will no longer pay the council for water and Thames Water will send a separate water bill to tenants 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: What should tenants do?

A: Tenants don't need to do anything yet, and should carry on paying their water charges to the council for now. Nothing will change until April 2019. Nearer the time we will write to tenants 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 tenants to confirm their 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 tenants paid their 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, of the council tenants who pay us their water charges as part of their rent, about 50% are on a rateable value charge and the other 50% are on an assessed household charge. Less than 1% of tenants receive Watersure Plus. Some Camden 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 a tenant's home rather than how much water is used.

Assessed household charge. This is a charge based on the number of bedrooms in a home rather than how much water is used. For tenants living 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 they live in.

Watersure Plus. This is a special tariff for customers on very low incomes and it is means tested. Eligible tenants who successfully apply can have their water charges reduced by up to 50 per cent. Thames Water have said that they are making it easier to apply for Watersure Plus from April this year.

Water meter. Tenants with a water meter are charged for the water that the household uses. Water meters are sometimes useful if water consumption in a household is low. However, not everyone can have a water meter fitted, especially tenants living in flats.

If a tenant wants to find out more about how they are charged or about changing how they are charged, refer them to Thames Water on **0800 009 4293** or at 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 them more. Is this true?

A: No. Thames Water have said that when they take over water payments from the council, tenants will stay on the same charge they are currently on – for example if a tenant is on the assessed household charge they 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. Caseworkers are already working with individual tenants to ensure they are aware of the change in their water billing. When the time comes for tenants to take action about this change, help will be available for those who need it and staff will take proactive steps to make contact with 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 payforwater@camden.gov.uk or on **020 7974 4444**.

Q: How can tenants reduce their water bills?

A: Thames Water offer the WaterSure Plus scheme to tenants on some means tested benefits and very low incomes. Camden Citizens Advice run the Make Water sense project for people who live in Camden Town, Primrose Hill, Canteloves, Gospel Oak, St Pancras or Somers Town wards. Thames Water also offers advice on their website about saving water and money at thameswater.co.uk/be-water-smart We will take steps to ensure tenants know about any ways to reduce their bills.

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 tenants get more information?

A: Tenants can find out more at thameswater.co.uk/yourthames or can contact Thames Water on their dedicated phone line for Camden tenants on **0800 009 4238**.

There are details about where to get help with money issues, debt and benefits on the council's website at camden.gov.uk/advice-money-benefits-debt as well as a webpage dedicated to the Thames Water changeover at camden.gov.uk/payforwater which links to relevant pages on the Thames Water website and includes information about how to reduce water bills. Tenants can email payforwater@camden.gov.uk or call Contact Camden on **020 7974 4444**.

Further information is available on the water regulator OFWAT's website ofwat.gov.uk