

Reduced bills for around 300,000 households in WaterSure reform

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Around 300,000 low-income households will see lower water bills thanks to the biggest overhaul of WaterSure in nearly 30 years.

Hundreds of thousands of households will benefit from lower water bills after the Government today (Fri March 6th) announced a major reform of WaterSure.

Low-income households who use high amounts of water can qualify to have their bills capped. They must have a water meter and either a specific medical condition or three or more children living at home.

More than a quarter of a million households (260,000) are already benefiting from the scheme, saving an average of £325 each – over a third of their typical bill.

But changes set out today will expand the eligibility criteria to include disability benefits – meaning a further 53,000 low-income households will see significant savings.

The reforms will also alter the way the price cap is determined, with most of the existing recipients seeing further savings of up to £100.

Together the changes – the first since the scheme was introduced in 1999 – will mean around 300,000 households will see substantial help with their bills via WaterSure.

Water Minister Emma Hardy said:

Vulnerable households are particularly affected by cost-of-living pressures, including water bills.

Reforming WaterSure will make a meaningful difference to hundreds of thousands of families who need support the most.

These steps build on our Water White Paper that champions customers, protects the environment, restores public trust and works to secure a water system fit for the future.

The WaterSure changes include:

- More people with disabilities will qualify. Those receiving disability benefits will now be eligible if their household income is below £25,745 per year.
- Bill caps will be fairer. Bills will be capped at the lowest average reading, helping those currently paying more
- People living alone will get extra help. Their bills will be capped at the average bill for a one-

person household.

- Less red tape. People will no longer need to pay for a doctor's note to apply, making it quicker, cheaper, and easier to get help.

These moves build on recent announcements in the Water White Paper that champion consumer savings, including an accelerated smart meter rollout to millions of homes to help people save money on their bills.

In addition, the introduction of mandatory water efficiency labelling on appliances - such as washing machines, dishwashers and showers - can save households around £125million in total on bills over the next decade.

The changes to WaterSure follow other Government reforms that will deliver more security, opportunity, and respect for every family.

The Child Poverty Strategy will lift around 550,000 children out of poverty by 2030 - the biggest reduction in a single parliament since records began.

Families can also benefit from wider support announced at the budget, including £150 off energy bills, increasing the living wage by £900 a year and the removal of the two-child limit.

Mike Keil, Chief Executive of the Consumer Council for Water (CCW), said:

We're delighted the UK Government is taking forward the majority of the changes CCW recommended as part of our review of the WaterSure scheme.

These improvements will bring peace of mind to tens of thousands more customers whose circumstances mean they have no choice but to use a significant amount of water for essential needs.

Many households are grappling with rising water bills, and these reforms will help relieve some of that pressure through extending support to more of the most vulnerable customers and also increasing the value of that financial assistance, in many cases.

James Taylor, Director of Strategy at disability equality charity Scope said:

Life costs more if you are disabled, and it's very good news that more disabled families will qualify for discounted water bills.

Water bills for some disabled families can be eye-wateringly high. Disabled families often have no alternative but to wash themselves and their clothes more frequently, or to use large amounts of water for medical procedures at home.

Grace Brownfield, Head of Influencing and Communications at Money Advice Trust, the charity which runs National Debtline, said:

People with disabilities or long-term health conditions can face particularly high essential costs, including for water, which can leave them more exposed to debt.

Strengthening WaterSure is therefore a welcome step that will help more households who rely on higher water use for medical reasons.

At National Debtline, 1 in 5 of people we helped last year were already behind on their water bills, so it's vital that support continues to be improved for those who need it most – including people who may still fall outside this scheme.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

CURRENT WATERSURE ELIGIBILITY:

- Customers must be on a water meter (or awaiting one). Those who cannot have a meter fitted must be paying an assessed charge.
- Customers must be a high water user because either
- They have three or more children under the age of 19 living at home. Or
- They have a medical condition, such as Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, weeping skin diseases, incontinence, desquamation (flaky skin disease) or renal failure requiring home dialysis. Medical evidence must be provided.
- Someone in the household must also be on at least one of the following benefits to qualify: Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit.
- Applications should be made annually to the water supplier.

WATERSURE ELIGIBILITY CHANGES:

- The changes will, for the first time, bring Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) into the legislative list of qualifying benefits.
- People on the above benefits must still be a high-water user for a medical reason.
- The change will also see a maximum household income of £25,745 in line with the average household in receipt of Universal Credit.
- These changes will bring 53,000 extra households into the scheme.
- The changes also remove the need to provide a medical note to prove a medical condition. Water companies have agreed to implement this voluntarily.
- The changes follow a consultation that ran from July to September and saw 63 responses.

WATERSURE CAP CHANGES:

- WaterSure users currently have their bills capped at the company's average bill amount, meaning those with low incomes or higher essential use are not penalised.
- However, there are currently discrepancies between how this average bill is calculated. Some companies will use the average value of everyone's water bill while others will only use metered readings (which are often lower and more accurate). Average bills also do not reflect the size of the household.
- The reforms will ensure companies use the lowest possible average bill as the cap for WaterSure. This could be the overall average or the metered average – whatever is lower.
- Likewise, the cap will be adjusted so a single household only pays for the average volume used by one person.
- An estimated 53,000 single households will save an additional £100. In addition, around

130,000 households with more than one occupant will save an additional average of £26 a year.

WATER BILLS:

- WaterSure users have higher water use because of medical conditions or 3+ children in the home. Their average bill before WaterSure is around £890.
- Average water bills for 25/26 rose by 26% to £603 per household. Average water bills for 26/27 are forecast to rise by 5% to £639.
- WaterSure users have their bills capped and in 24/25, the average reduction was £325.
- In 2024/25 (the latest year data is available) some 260,000 households received a WaterSure discount. Some 230,000 were in England and 30,000 were in Wales.
- Changes to WaterSure will be mandatory in England and voluntary in Wales.
- The reforms, which are set to come into force in early 2027, will be funded by an additional £1.14 onto the bills of other water customers.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reduced-bills-for-around-300000-households-in-watersure-reform>