

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP  
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4DF

xx<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

As a group of organisations who care about, work alongside and support people of all ages living on a low income, we are writing to ask you to urgently consult on the introduction of a national social tariff for water bills. The people we engage with experiencing financial insecurity, while trying to cope with high water bills, cannot afford a delay.

Households in England and Wales are expected to spend an average of £603 in 2025/26 on their water and sewerage bill, 26% more than the year before. Water is a basic essential and should be affordable for everyone, but people on low incomes regularly tell us that they struggle to pay their bill. Many are resorting to desperate coping strategies like avoiding flushing the toilet, cutting back on doing laundry, and showering less often.

"I only use my kettle one or twice a day – more often than not just once. I flush the toilet once in the morning and once last thing. I use my washing machine just once a week, and have a bath just once." Anonymous.

Independent Age commissioned nationally representative polling with YouGov in May this year. It found that 42% of older adults (65+) in England and Wales living on a low income of below £15,000 per year describe keeping up with their water bills as either a 'constant struggle' or a struggle from 'time to time'. It will be a similar picture for working age adults living on low income.

As you will know, current water social tariffs provided by individual companies do offer vital support to people living in poverty, but the postcode lottery means that people living in financial hardship across England and Wales pay vastly different amounts for their water bills. There is now significant backing for a national social tariff to address this, with the Independent Water Commission recently making it a key recommendation of its final report. Public support is also substantial. Research from Independent Age shows that 83% of the UK public support providing further help to older people in poverty with their water costs.

A national water social tariff would be an effective way to provide fair and consistent support for people in financial hardship, helping ensure more people are able to access the water they need without having to make extreme sacrifices. We strongly believe introducing a national water social tariff would make a tangible positive difference to the lives of people of all ages living on low incomes, and we ask you to launch a consultation on this as soon as possible.

We hope you will join us, and others across sectors, to make this a reality.

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned

Independent Age

[Signatories]