

Joint letter to the Secretary of State calling for a national social tariff for water

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

12 September 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment to Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We look forward to working with you in your new role, particularly on ensuring everyone can access affordable water. This is an area on which we have been working alongside the Minister for Water and Flooding and your officials.

Water is a basic essential and should be affordable for everyone. Yet people on low incomes regularly tell us that they struggle to pay their water bills. 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 once or twice a day – more often than not just once... I use my washing machine just once a week and have a bath just once.” Anonymous.

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 prioritise consulting on the introduction of a national social tariff for water bills.**

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.

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’. The picture is similar for working age adults –

research by Ofwat published in May this year found that 50% of water bill payers reported having cut down on water usage at some point because they were worried about the cost of their bill.

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. We look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned

Independent Age

Age Cymru

Age UK

Carers UK

Christians Against Poverty

Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance

Debt Justice

Disability Rights UK

Energise Sussex Coast

Essential Services Access Network

Fair by Design

Fuel Poverty Action

International Longevity Centre UK

Money and Mental Health

Money Advice Trust

NASUWT Federation of Retired Member's Associations

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Royal National Institute of Blind People

Sense

StepChange Debt Charity

Sustainability First

The Centre for Sustainable Energy

Trussell

Wise Age

Women's Budget Group