# Families warned of steep water bill rises as government backs ‘bathtime tax’ proposals



Families across the UK are being warned to brace for a potential "bathtime tax," following government proposals that could further escalate costs for households, particularly in the wake of a new Labour government that's already failing to protect the most vulnerable. The plan involves introducing punitive tariffs for higher water users, particularly impacting families who consume above-average amounts during the summer months. Water companies, seeking to excuse their exorbitant pricing, claim these changes could lead to lower bills for lower consumers, but critics, including several advocacy groups, assert that young families will bear the brunt of this ill-conceived strategy.

Water Minister Emma Hardy has championed these new charging models, boasting government support for trials that include "rising block" tariffs—essentially a tax on families trying to make the most of a basic resource. While Hardy proclaims, “This Government supports innovative approaches aimed at making bills fairer and more affordable,” the reality belies her words, as these tariffs are poised to add financial strain to households already grappling with an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis.

The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) has expressed alarm over anticipated water bill hikes that could reach up to 70% by 2030, a staggering figure that most households in England and Wales will find insufferable. An overwhelming majority—84%—already deem these projected increases unmanageable, as living costs soar. While water companies tout these hikes as necessary for critical maintenance, skepticism abounds, especially given ongoing issues with leakage and pollution. Thames Water and Southern Water have emerged as prime offenders, seeking to foist substantial price rises onto families.

In a troubling shift, Water UK now suggests that households with larger gardens or swimming pools should be hit with increased charges. This proposed system, predicated on outdated rateable values rather than actual usage, signals a troubling pivot towards targeting wealthier households while leaving the majority exposed. Comprehensive metering, particularly in ‘water-stressed’ areas as identified by the Environment Agency, would only exacerbate this divide.

Concerns about affordability are paramount. While companies promote social tariff schemes aimed at assisting the most vulnerable, the reality is that current support systems are a mess. Families face a "postcode lottery" in assistance levels, leaving many without the necessary support to make ends meet.

As the debate over these convoluted pricing structures gains steam, it is crucial to question the underlying motives driving these unjustified bill increases. The average household water bill is set to rise by 7.5% to around £448 this year, with some regions facing even steeper hikes. What’s more, industry forecasts suggest that by 2025, bills could skyrocket an additional £123, bringing them to approximately £603 a year. This demonstrates not only an urgent need for reform in water service management but highlights the critical importance of ensuring water access remains affordable for all.

Public dissatisfaction regarding water management practices, particularly concerning rampant sewage discharges into our waterways, has intensified calls for structural reforms. With consumers and advocacy groups demanding stronger oversight and a dedicated ombudsman, the government stands at a crossroads. The decisions made in this crucial moment could either relieve the mounting pressures on struggling families or deepen the crisis stemming from unaffordable essential services.

Without genuine commitment to overhaul the water sector to provide transparency and efficiency, families will continue to face skyrocketing costs, intensifying financial strain and worsening the uncertainty surrounding access to this vital resource.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14769475/Brace-bathtime-tax-families-bills-Labour-charges-high-users.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/dcb374a1-687b-4496-8bf9-426ce6b1eddb> - The UK water consumer watchdog has warned that proposed water bill hikes of up to 70% by 2030 are 'unaffordable' for most households in England and Wales. Only 16% of people find the increase manageable. The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) expressed concerns about the affordability of such plans as the economic regulator Ofwat evaluates requests by water companies to raise bills, potentially exceeding £800 per year by 2030. Companies argue the need for these increases to fund maintenance, investment, and future borrowings. Financial instability among companies, high leakage rates, and raw sewage concerns have intensified public dissatisfaction. Thames Water and Southern Water are among those pushing for significant hikes. Although social tariff schemes exist to aid struggling households, the CCW encourages companies to use investor funds to support vulnerable customers. Meanwhile, Water UK emphasizes the necessity of investment for infrastructure security and environmental protection. Ofwat assures that bill increases will be scrutinised to ensure they are justified and beneficial.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/40a95e5f-6351-4c91-b310-42a095f78824> - Water UK, representing water and sewage companies in England and Wales, will recommend that households with large gardens or swimming pools pay more for water in a submission to a government-commissioned sector review. Currently, only regions designated as 'water-stressed' by the Environment Agency require water meters. Other households are charged using outdated rateable values. Water UK proposes the introduction of block tariffs where water costs increase with higher consumption, which would target wealthier households with greater usage. The group also wants to make water metering compulsory and eliminate fixed standing charges. This proposal is part of a broader 180-page reform plan following public backlash over pollution and service failures, as water companies have paid £83bn in dividends and accrued £74bn in debt since privatisation, with insufficient infrastructure investment. Water UK will also advocate for clearer regulatory roles among Ofwat, the Environment Agency, and the Drinking Water Inspectorate, simpler performance monitoring, and increased consumer protection via a dedicated ombudsman. It supports devolving some regulatory power to local communities. Ofwat and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs acknowledged the need for reform and pledged to consider the commission's final conclusions, due in June.
4. <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2023/january/water-bills-rise-2023-save/> - The average annual water bill in England and Wales is set to rise by around £31 a year (7.5%) from April, industry body Water UK has announced today. But prices will vary depending on where you live and some will see much larger increases. Meanwhile, those in Scotland will see bills rise by £19 a year (5%). According to Water UK, the average household water and sewerage bills in England and Wales will rise to £448 from an average of £417 last year. However, regional differences mean customers in some areas will face bills of over £500 a year. For help reducing these costs, see our Cut your water bills guide.
5. <https://www.water.org.uk/news-views-publications/news/more-3-million-households-receive-reduced-bills-water-companies> - Water companies in England and Wales will support more than 3 million households with their bills as part of a financial package of affordability support worth more than £4.1 billion over the next five years. Most supported households will either receive ‘social tariffs’ or ‘WaterSure’ charges that will reduce their water bills. Customers who are struggling to pay their bills can also receive a range of support measures including payment breaks and debt forgiveness. Customers should contact their water company directly to see what help is available if they are concerned. This largest-ever affordability support will be accompanied by record-breaking investment, approved by the regulator Ofwat in December 2024. Water companies will invest around £20 billion from April 2025 to March 2026, the highest ever level of expenditure in a single year, and the first in a five-year programme of investment worth £104 billion up to 2030. The investment will help to build 9 new reservoirs and 9 new water transfer schemes, upgrade the capacity of 1,700 wastewater treatment works to reduce pollution and improve and protect more than 15,000 kilometres of rivers across England and Wales. This record level of investment follows more than a decade in which bills have fallen in real terms. Customer bills will rise by about £10 a month from April 2025. This equates to an increase of £123 (26%) on the previous year with the average annual bill set to be £603. Following this increase, water bills are now only around 5% higher than they were in 2010 in real terms. Government has taken steps to ensure funds raised by increased water bills are guaranteed only to pay for investment in things that are genuinely new and genuinely needed, such as meeting targets for our water and sewerage system, and represent value for money. If improvements aren’t delivered, then customer bills will automatically be reduced by the regulator. Targeted support is also available for low-income customers who use a lot of water for essential family or health reasons through the WaterSure scheme. And, more broadly, a variety of measures (not just financial) is available through the Priority Services Register for a wide range of people, from those with sight, hearing, or mobility difficulties, to parents with babies under 12 months old.
6. <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2024/12/water-bills-rise-england-wales-2025/> - In England and Wales, prices vary depending on where you live. The table below shows how average forecast water and sewerage charges are set to change in England and Wales from April: Water and sewerage firm-by-firm average price changes Firm | 2024/25 bill | 2025/26 bill & rise vs 2024/25 Anglian Water | £527 | £626 +£99 (19%) Dŵr Cymru | £503 | £639 +£136 (27%) Hafren Dyfrdwy | £447 | £590 +£143 (32%) Northumbrian Water | £426 | £506 +£79 (19%) Severn Trent Water | £457 | £556 +£99 (22%) South West Water (1) | £520 | £686 +£166 (32%) Southern Water | £478 | £703 +£224 (47%) Thames Water | £488 | £639 +£151 (31%) United Utilities | £486 | £598 +£112 (23%) Wessex Water | £556 | £669 +£113 (20%) Yorkshire Water | £467 | £602 +£136 (29%) (1) South West Water includes both the South West area and Bristol area due to the merger between Bristol Water and South West Water in 2023. Water-only firms average price changes (you'll be billed for sewerage separately by one of the firms above) Firm | 2024/25 bill | £235 +£43 (23%) Portsmouth Water | £120 | £150 +£30 (25%) South East Water | £245 | £294 +£49 (20%) South Staffs Water (1) | £163 | £203 +£40 (24%) SES Water | £254 | £249 -£5 (-2%) (1) Prices may be higher depending on where you live within Affinity Water or South Staffs Water's catchment areas. This increase is larger than expected. The regulator Ofwat says it's in part to pay for a £104 billion upgrade of the water sector to deliver 'substantial, lasting, improvements for customers and the environment'. Separately, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has announced an inquiry into reforming the water sector with a report expected in mid-2025. Meanwhile, the Government announced in December 2024 that it will force water firms to increase the compensation offered to households when things go wrong; for example taking maximum payments for issues such as low water pressure from £25 to up to £250 and payments for internal sewage flooding from £1,000 to £2,000. These changes are expected to take force in 2025.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/feb/02/households-in-england-and-wales-face-biggest-water-bills-rise-in-decades> - Households in England and Wales are facing the biggest increase to water bills in almost two decades from April, putting further pressure on budgets already weathering the cost of living crisis. The industry body Water UK said the typical water bill will increase to an average of £448 a year from April, a hike of 7.5%. Consumer groups said the increase of 8p a day, or £31 a year, could be a 'tipping point' for the one in five customers who were already struggling to pay. The organisation added that water firms are to invest a further £70bn to 'eliminate harm' from storm overflows and increase water supplies by building new reservoirs and national water transfer schemes. It said companies had recently increased the level of support they offered to consumers by more than £200m. However, consumer groups said help with bills was a 'postcode lottery', as each firm ran individual schemes. Emma Clancy, the chief executive of the Consumer Council for Water, said: 'Water is essential for all of us so no one should be worried about being able to afford their bill. These increases will bring more uncertainty to struggling households at a time when they can’t be certain they will get the help they need. Low-income households need immediate relief and the long-term security of knowing their water bill will be affordable. It’s not fair that struggling households face a postcode lottery when it comes to getting help with their bill – that’s why we urgently need a new water affordability scheme that provides consistent support based on people’s needs.