Introduction

Wessex Water provides sewerage services in the south west of England, including Dorset, Somerset, Bristol, most of Wiltshire and parts of Gloucestershire, Hampshire and Devon.

Sewage from 2.7 million people leaves homes, businesses and industry and travels through a network of more than 30,000km (18,641 miles) of public sewers until it reaches one of our sewage treatment works. There it is treated before being safely returned to the environment.

This system of public sewers and treatment works is called the sewerage network. It is owned by Wessex Water and we have a duty to ensure it is properly operated and maintained.

We aim to appropriately treat sewage and sludge so that it can be safely returned to the environment, work with others to have a biodiversity rich landholding and contribute to the biodiversity of the region we serve.

Water companies comply with standards set by the Environment Agency. Our 405 sewage treatment works achieve an extremely high compliance with discharge consents.

This leaflet details the sewerage services we provide. It explains what your rights are and what to do if things go wrong.
Sewers

Types of sewer system
Modern homes generally drain into what is known as a separate system. In this case there are normally two public sewers.

One is a foul sewer taking sewage from washing machines, sinks and toilets, while the other takes surface water or rainwater that drains off roofs and driveways.

Older properties may be connected to a combined system in which one sewer takes both the sewage and surface water or rainwater and transports it to a treatment works.

Types of domestic drainage
Changes on 1 October 2011 to sewer ownership mean there are several different types of drainage as shown in the table below.

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Drainage responsibility
Wessex Water is responsible for more than 30,000km (18,641 miles) of public sewers, many of which were previously the responsibility of private individuals. A large number of former private sewers and lateral drains were transferred to Wessex Water responsibility in October 2011. These sewers and drains are generally situated in gardens, roads or public open spaces.

Sometimes our public sewer network runs through private land in which case we are allowed a legal right of access for maintenance purposes. We are also entitled by law to prevent building taking place over or near our sewers which could damage them or hinder our ability to maintain them properly.

Private drains which carry your household’s sewage and surface water are your responsibility to the point where they either leave your property boundary or connect with our public sewer, whichever comes first.

You are responsible for all private pipework inside your property boundary which serves just your property.

If you have a shared sewer which was in use before 1 October 1937 and serves more than one property, it is probable that we are responsible for it.

We can help you to identify who owns the sewer if you contact us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) or call 0845 600 5 489 for a leaflet explaining the changes in ownership.

Cesspits, septic tanks and pumping stations
Your property may be connected to a cesspit or septic tank. If so, it is your responsibility to empty and maintain the cesspit or septic tank and manage all of the drainage pipework associated with it.

Where foul or surface water flows cannot be transferred solely by gravity, a pumping station and rising main may be involved.

Where a sewage pumping station has not been constructed to adoptable standards, or never offered for adoption, it may remain in private ownership. Legislation triggering the overnight transfer of sewers and lateral drains also included provision for many of these pumping stations to transfer to public ownership over a period of time.

A five year period running up to 1 October 2016 has been allowed for water and sewerage companies to identify these pumping stations and understand the issues relating to their transfer, operation and maintenance. In order to
be valid for automatic transfer on 1 October 2016, the pumping station must either:

• serve more than one property, or
• if serving only one property then it must be situated outside of the boundary of that property.

Private pumping stations may still be offered for early adoption as per existing procedures in the lead up to overnight transfer.

Records
We keep records of our public sewers and you have the right to see them free of charge.

Extract copies are also available for a small administrative charge – please contact our mapping department on 01225 526422 (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm).

A charge will be made for this service but public sewer records can be viewed at local district council offices.

Private or unadopted sewers
Historically there were many sewers in our region that we did not own. When they were built, or when they would normally have become public sewers, they did not meet the required standards or the owner or developer did not want them to become public.

Government legislation brought many of these into our ownership to remove the burden from homeowners of maintaining pipework which lies outside of their property boundary. Sewers had to be connected to the public sewerage system by 1 July 2011 to be included in a blanket transfer on 1 October 2011.

Drainage systems connected to the public system after 1 July 2011 are subject to a follow up "blanket adoption" – which will happen after the introduction of further drainage legislation. This legislation is aimed at preventing the construction of any further private sewers.

If you are buying a property you should instruct your solicitor to check the status of drainage pipework within, and outside of, your property boundary.

New connections to the public sewer
Government is introducing regulations which will require those intending to connect to a public sewer to enter into an adoption agreement prior to the granting of any permission to connect to the public system.

You will have to pay both a fee for the connection and an infrastructure charge for each new connection and we will provide you with full information regarding both.

In some cases permission can be refused, eg, if the connection will have a harmful effect on our sewers.

In the event that you are unhappy with our decision you are entitled to appeal to the industry regulator, Ofwat.

For more information on new sewer connections see our Developer charges booklet or contact developer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm) or visit the developer services website at www.wessexwater.co.uk.
What happens if there is no public sewer?

Sometimes there may not be an existing public sewer adjacent to the site that can be used to serve your property. You may wish to lay a sewer from your site to a convenient point on the public system. Where this lies outside of your property boundary this will become public. It will therefore need to be constructed to the required standards under agreement with ourselves.

We can also provide a new sewer in two ways:
• in response to a requisition
• as part of our first time sewerage programme.

Requisition of new sewers or laterals for domestic purposes

If you have a new development site of more than one property with no access to a public sewer because you are unable to obtain the agreement of another landowner, Wessex Water can normally lay a sewer or sewers to serve your site. We can negotiate land entry, easements and compensation for crossing the land.

In the case of sewers we are required to offer various methods of payment. For sewers we normally require financial security, usually in the form of a cash deposit to the value of our estimated cost of the works less an allowance for income we will obtain from the properties which are to be served by the sewer.

If you wish to connect non-domestic flows to our sewerage system, you will need a trade effluent discharge consent. You will need to submit a trade effluent notice giving details of the proposed flows. We may impose conditions to safeguard our sewers and sewage treatment works.

First time sewerage schemes

We are sometimes asked to consider providing a new sewerage system in an area lacking mains drainage and the application may be made by a district council, parish council or individual householder.

Applicants should contact us for an initial discussion and an application form or see our website.

When the application has been made, Wessex Water will investigate whether the scheme is viable and confirm if and when it could proceed.

If it is not viable, we will advise you of your alternatives.

If you are unhappy with our decision you are entitled to appeal to the Environment Agency.

For more information contact developer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm) or visit the developer services website on www.wessexwater.co.uk

Where there is insufficient capacity in our system to accommodate your discharge we may require you to pay for any necessary improvements. It is important that you contact us at the earliest possible stage as major works may be required to accommodate your development.

If you need to requisition a lateral drain for a single new property we can provide this as a public lateral drain in a similar way. All costs are fully re-charged to the applicant in this case. Payment in full becomes due after we have laid the drain and we normally require financial security in advance, usually in the form of a cash deposit to the value of our cost of the works.

In the event that you are unhappy with our decision you are entitled to appeal to Ofwat.

For more information on new sewer connections see our Developer charges booklet or contact developer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm) or visit the developer services website on www.wessexwater.co.uk
Pipelaying

Sometimes we may have to lay pipes in land which is in private ownership or occupation. Where this is the case, we will consult the occupier and/or landowner and by the use of good working practice, seek to minimise the disruption.

We will carry out reinstatement after our work and restore the land to its original condition. Where this is not practicable, compensation is payable for loss or damage caused by the works.

We have a code of practice for the exercise of pipelaying powers on private land that sets out good practice with regard to our powers and duties when we carry out such work. It also explains what you (the landowner, and/or occupier) are entitled to expect.

The Water Industry Act 1991 allows, and in some cases requires, us to do these works. It also lays down some rules for us to follow when we lay, alter or maintain pipes and their associated accessories.

Appeals against decisions regarding pipelaying can be referred to Ofwat.

We aim to run our sewage treatment works to avoid or minimise problems to the public. Should you feel any of our activities are causing a problem, eg, bad odour, flies etc, please contact us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Sewage treatment produces a by-product in the form of sewage sludge which is further treated and recycled in accordance with the standards set by the Environment Agency. The sludge formed during the treatment process can be turned into an effective fertilizer.

For a copy of our code of practice for the exercise of pipelaying powers please contact us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Protection against sewage flooding

It is our aim to protect against sewer flooding. Our sewers are designed to take away sewage from properties and in some cases surface water which runs off roads, footpaths and paved areas.

While our sewerage system can cope with day to day flows, exceptional weather can overwhelm it and cause flooding. Blockages in a sewer or the failure of a pumping station can also result in flooding.

In the event of a sewer flooding, your property could be affected both internally and externally. Internal flooding is less common and can be caused when the system backs up through the internal drains or toilet inside your property.

Whose responsibility is it?

If the flooding is caused by a blockage in a public sewer or public lateral drain, we will arrange for the blockage to be cleared at our cost.

Following a flooding incident from a public sewer or drain, we will carry out clean up work and assess any remedial works required.

If the flooding is caused by a problem in your private drain, you will be responsible.

Whatever the cause, flooding can be a particularly unpleasant and distressing experience. It can also be costly to rectify any damage caused. This is why most household insurance policies cover these exceptional circumstances. We recommend you check that you have a household insurance policy that covers sewage flooding.

We are not legally liable for loss or damage by flooding from public sewers unless we have been negligent.

Sewage treatment

Our 405 sewage treatment works receive sewage for treatment via public sewers and then safely discharge the cleaned effluent to nearby watercourses or the sea.

The treatment works comply with standards set by the Environment Agency, a statutory body with powers and duties to protect and enhance the environment. The quality of sewage treatment in the Wessex Water region is extremely high and compliance with discharge consents is virtually 100%.
Who to contact

If sewage from a public sewer floods your property you should contact our Sewage Floodline immediately on 0845 850 5 959 (24 hours; calls are charged at the local rate, depending on your service provider).

It is particularly important that you contact us when a flooding event occurs. This helps us to better understand the operation of our network and set priorities for ensuring that the risk of flooding is removed as soon as possible.

You should also contact your household insurance company immediately. Any claims for loss or damage must be directed to them. They will provide advice as to the actions you will need to take to ensure the terms and conditions of your policy are met.

If the flooding is due to a problem with your private drain we may be able to help you. We can offer advice on contacting a private drainage clearance company.

Our trained staff can tell you whether a blockage is in a public sewer or private drain – it is advisable you check before employing a plumber or drain clearance contractor. Most blockages can be cleared within minutes so ensure that you obtain a clear breakdown of the costs involved before the work begins.

What will we do if your property is flooded?

Under our Wessex Water Promise we aim to respond to all sewage flooding incidents within:

- two hours of a first report of internal flooding
- four hours of a first report of external flooding.

We will also provide a clean up service where possible, within 12 hours where your property is flooded internally and 24 hours externally. This service is free of charge.

Compensation

If your property is flooded with sewage from a public sewer you need to let us know as soon as possible. We will compensate you.

If your property has been flooded internally you will automatically receive an amount equivalent to your annual sewerage charges (or £150, whichever is the greater). If you have not told us about the flooding then you need to claim for compensation within three months of the incident.

If you experience internal flooding, we will write to you within five working days with your compensation payment, provide you with a named contact and inform you of the action we intend to take and any investigations we intend to make.

Within one month of the flooding incident, we will write to you to update you on our investigation into the incident and the next steps we will take. We will also provide you with updates on our programme of work to solve the problem.

In each case of external flooding you can claim a no quibble payment equivalent to 50% of your annual sewerage charges (or £75, whichever is the greater) – subject to a maximum of £500 in one year. Claims must be made within three months.

We will also pay for any uninsured losses under terms detailed in our leaflet Sewage flooding – what to do if your home or property is flooded with sewage.

Compensation payments do not apply if:

- the flooding happened because of exceptional weather conditions or industrial action
- the flooding was caused by your actions or any defect, blockage or inadequacy of private drains or sewers.

To claim an external flooding payment call us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm), email operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk or write to:

Operational customer services
Wessex Water, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7WW

For a copy of our leaflet Sewage flooding – what to do if your home or property is flooded with sewage contact us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).
Important information

Bag it and bin it
Sewers are designed to take away waste water from sinks and baths, toilet paper and human waste flushed down the toilet, and rainwater which runs into road drains.

But hundreds of people cause blockages in sewers or damage to the environment by putting rubbish down the toilet.

Just because an item is called disposable, doesn’t mean it is safe to flush it down the toilet. Instead you should bag it and bin it.

To prevent sewer flooding incidents and to help protect the environment please follow this advice on disposal of items.

Cotton buds, wet wipes, ladies tights, bandages, plasters and dental floss – dispose of these in the bin along with other household rubbish.

Condoms, tampons and applicators – wrap well and dispose of in the bin. Sanitary towels and incontinence pads – use the special bags for sanitary protection available from pharmacies.

Disposable nappies – flush any human waste down the toilet but not the nappy. Instead the nappy should be well wrapped and disposed of in the bin – nappy bags are available from supermarkets.

Razors and blades – put these into a rigid container before placing in the bin.

Medicines – any unwanted or unused medicines should be returned to your local pharmacy for safe disposal. Do not dispose of medicines with other household waste and remember to keep all medicines out of reach of children.

Syringes and needles – disposing of these down the toilet or in your household rubbish is dangerous and could cause injury to a member of our sewerage team or a refuse collector. To dispose of these safely, please contact your local hospital or health authority who will be able to advise you on the availability of local needle banks.

If you have any questions about the safe disposal of your waste, please contact customer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Knock, knock! Who’s there? Be stranger aware!

Bogus callers often prey on elderly or vulnerable people by pretending they work for a water company to con their way into homes.

All Wessex Water staff carry photographic identification and will be happy to wait outside while you confirm their identity by calling 0845 600 4 600.

Where we have contractors working on our behalf they will be equipped with identification cards and contact numbers to confirm that they are attending your problem on our behalf.

As a further precaution against bogus callers, we operate a doorstep security password system enabling you to check whether a caller is genuine. For further information request our Customer Care Plus leaflet.

If you think someone is not a real Wessex Water employee do not let them into your home and contact the police immediately.

Further information

We have a range of free leaflets about our water and sewerage services and further information is available on our website www.wessexwater.co.uk

Write to us: Operational enquiries, Wessex Water, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7WW, Alternatively email operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk or call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

We want to hear from you if you have any comments or complaints about the services we provide. See our code of practice for enquiries and complaints for more information.

If you are unhappy with the response you receive from us, you can contact:

Consumer Council for Water (CCW)
Call: 0845 707 8 268
Fax: 0117 955 7037
www.ccwater.org.uk

Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)
Call: 0121 644 7500
Email: enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk
www.ofwat.gov.uk
For more information visit www.wessexwater.co.uk
or call 0845 600 4 600
(Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. Emergency service at other times)

To protect our customers and staff telephone calls may be recorded.
Wessex Water is not responsible for the content of external websites.

www.wessexwater.co.uk