



Debt recovery

We want to help

As a Bristol Water and Wessex Water customer, you are entitled to a high level of service from us and our billing company Bristol Wessex Billing Services Limited (BWBSL).

This leaflet forms part of our core customer information and explains how we can help if you are finding it difficult to afford to pay your water bill.

It also explains the action we will take if you do not pay your bill or payment plan, or do not pay on time. We will either:

- take legal action, which means you will incur additional costs and it may affect your credit rating

or

- send your account to a debt collection agency

or

- apply for payments to be deducted from any benefits you receive.

Ways to pay your bill

To make it easier to pay your bill, we offer the following options free of charge:

- **Direct Debit** – the easiest way to pay your bill.
Visit bristolwater.co.uk/direct-debit or wessexwater.co.uk/direct-debit
- **at your bank** – please take your bill with cash or a cheque made payable to BWBSL. Normally no fee is payable at your own bank
- **internet/mobile banking** – payments should be made to Bristol Wessex Billing Services Ltd, please quote sort code 40-02-50 and account number 61229737*
- **online** – you can pay online with a debit card or credit card at bristolwater.co.uk/pay-now or wessexwater.co.uk/pay-now
- **at any Payzone outlet** – please take your bill and payment in cash to a local Payzone outlet. See www.payzone.co.uk
- **at a post office** – please fill in the payment slip and take it with your bill, debit card or payment in cash to any post office
- **telephone** – call our automated line 0345 600 1 019.* Make sure you have your card and bill to hand
- **by post** – cheques should be made payable to BWBSL. Please write your customer reference number on the back of your cheque and post it with the payment slip to:
BWBSL, 1 Clevedon Walk, Nailsea, Bristol BS48 1WA. Please do not send cash or post dated cheques

* Please quote the payment reference number found on the top right hand corner of your bill.

If you would like further information about any of our payment options, please contact customer services using the details on page 6.

Spreading the cost of your bill

If you are unable to pay your bill in full we have a number of payment options to help spread the cost, at no extra charge.

Contact us and we will discuss a payment plan to clear the amount you owe in a reasonable time.

We offer monthly instalments for customers paying by Direct Debit but can arrange fortnightly, or in cases of extreme hardship, weekly payments for other payment methods.

Once we agree a payment plan with you, we expect you to make the agreed payments otherwise we will cancel the plan and you will have to pay the whole bill.

Appointing someone to manage your account

You may need to appoint someone to manage your financial affairs including your water and/or sewerage account. You can appoint a nominee by registering for our Priority Services scheme (see page 5) or let us know if you already have a lasting power of attorney so we can add it to your account.

If you find you find yourself in vulnerable circumstances such as a bereavement, job loss or ill health then we can support. Please contact us as soon as possible so we can find the best solution for you.

If you have a problem paying

We understand that challenges can arise and if you are struggling to keep up with your water bill get in touch with us as soon as possible.

Call: 0345 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; Saturday, 9am to 1pm).

The sooner we know, the sooner we can suggest a solution for you. We have a range of schemes to help depending on your individual circumstances.

Visit wessexwater.co.uk/help-to-pay or bristolwater.co.uk/help-to-pay

Switch and save money with a water meter

Switching to a meter is quick, easy and FREE. And if it's not cheaper for you in the first two years, we promise to refund the difference and switch you back.

On average people save £94 in a year. 9 out of 10 people find out it's cheaper with a meter. Visit bristolwater.co.uk/cheaper-meter or call 0345 600 3 600.

Terms and conditions apply.

Free water saving devices

If you already have a water meter we offer advice on how to save water and money. You can order a free water saving device from our website: bristolwater.co.uk/savewater

Payment breaks

If you have had a change in circumstance, a payment break can help.

A payment break is a short break from making payments on your bill. If you need a little longer to pay or time to deal with a change in circumstances a payment break can help. We can stop your payments for a limited time for any reason; including waiting for Universal Credit payments.

Flexible payment plan

If you find yourself in short-term financial difficulty, we can offer you a flexible payment plan. This means you can pay less than you need to towards your bill for an agreed period and catch up on payments later.

Water Direct – using benefits payments

If you are behind with your water bill and receive one of these benefits: Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit or Universal Credit, we can take payments directly from your benefits under Water Direct.

To pay this way, please contact us. The amount you pay each week is worked out to cover the bill for the year and a small amount towards any debt.

Bill cap scheme – WaterSure

If you have a water meter and you need to use a large amount of water for reasons you cannot control, WaterSure may be able to help. WaterSure puts a limit on the amount you have to pay.

To qualify, you must receive one of the major social benefits or tax credits, such as Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

In addition, you must either:

- receive child benefit for three or more children under 19 living in your household, or
- have someone in the household with a medical condition that causes them to use significantly more water.

Reduced bill – Assist

Assist is our low rate tariff for customers in extreme financial difficulty. The tariff reduces your bill in line with your financial circumstances and ability to pay and can be used alongside our Restart schemes. To apply you will need to seek independent debt advice.

Debt support scheme – Restart

Restart is designed for customers with significant water debt. It is a two-year scheme and if you qualify we will agree a payment plan based on your financial circumstances. Normally your payments will cover your current bill and, if possible, an additional amount towards your debt.

If you pay your current year's charges, at the end of year one we will reduce your debt by an equivalent amount. In year two, if you continue to pay your current year charges, we will clear your remaining debt and you will be back on track.

To apply for Restart you may need to seek independent debt advice.

Discount for low income pensioners

You might be entitled to around £55 off your water bill if state pension is your only form of income or you receive Pension Credit. To apply, all adults in your household must in receipt of Pension Credit or have state pension as their only form of income.

Independent advice

You will need to receive independent debt advice and complete a financial budget to apply for Assist. We may also ask you to do this if you are applying for Restart. The following organisations will offer advice free of charge.

- **Citizens Advice** – 0800 144 8848 or www.citizensadvice.org.uk
The agency will complete a financial budget and the application on your behalf.
- **StepChange** - 0800 138 1111 or www.stepchange.org/debtremedy
- **National Debtline** - 0808 808 4000 or www.nationaldebtline.org
- **Money Wellness** - 0161 518 8282 or www.moneywellness.com

As well as helping with your water bill, advisers may also help you with any other debts you may have and check you are receiving all the benefits to which you are entitled.

Benefits advice

Jobcentre Plus can also give you advice on benefits and tax credits you may be eligible for. See your local phone book, local library or look on the internet for details.

If you are disabled or caring for someone who is, you may be entitled to extra help. For further information please:

- visit www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/disability
- contact the social services department of your local authority, which is unlikely to offer you financial support but can offer general advice.

Get in touch today

Remember, if you are having problems paying or you need more information on any of our schemes designed to help customers in financial difficulty, contact customer services as soon as possible using the details on page 6.

We may put the debt recovery process on hold while your enquiry is being dealt with.

If you prefer, you can nominate a relative, friend, carer or support worker to contact us on your behalf.

Disputing the bill

If you think you are not responsible for the bill, or you believe it is incorrect, please contact customer services immediately using the details on page 6. We will put the debt recovery process on hold until the situation is resolved.

We will also do this if the CCW or Jobcentre Plus are involved and contact us on your behalf.

In the case of a disputed bill, you must pay any amount not in dispute immediately while we investigate.

We will not continue with debt recovery action if the bill is wrong. If we cannot agree with you, we will ask a court to decide.

If you want to make a complaint?

If we don't get things right we will do everything we can to get it resolved.

Step 1 The quickest way to get any issue resolved is to call us

Step 2 If you are not happy with our resolution, then get back in touch and we will escalate your complaint to a Senior Manager for review

Step 3 If you are not happy with the final resolution, your issue is over eight weeks old, or you just want some free, trusted, independent advice, you can call the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales by calling 0300 034 2222 or use its online form at www.ccw.org.uk/contact-us

What happens if you choose not to pay?

Please let us know if you are experiencing problems paying. We cannot help if you do not let us know and we will take action to recover any money you owe us.

Usually we leave a minimum of 14 days for you to pay your bill. If you do not pay or contact us we will send a further debt recovery document which will show how much you owe and what will happen if you don't pay.

This could be either issuing a county court claim, passing your account to a debt collection agency or an application to the Department for Work and Pensions for direct payments from any benefits you receive.

While you have a debt outstanding with us we may also contact you by phone or visit your home to discuss your account.

Please note these timings can vary according to an individual's circumstances, particularly their payment record. If you have a poor payment history, we may shorten the timescales.

If you do not keep to a payment plan that we have agreed with you, we will cancel the plan and expect you to pay all outstanding charges.

We may use credit reference agencies to check the information we hold is correct. The agencies may record our search.

If we issue a county court claim, you will incur additional costs of at least £70. This may affect your credit rating and make it harder for you to obtain credit.

How will enforcement action affect you?

Once a County Court Judgment (CCJ) has been entered, we can ask the county court to issue any of the following enforcement proceedings:

- **attachment of earnings** – if you are employed, we ask the court to make an order to have payments taken directly from your pay. This means your employer will be given the details of your debt and of the CCJ
- **bankruptcy** – we ask the court to declare you bankrupt
- **charging order** – if you own your property, we ask the judge to make a charging order against it. If you have a mortgage, the lender is given the details of your debt and of the CCJ. A charging order is registered at the Land Registry and prevents the sale, remortgage or disposal of a property until the debt and the charge have been cleared
- **High Court Writ of Control** – a high court enforcement officer is instructed to take control of (seize) goods
- **personal appearance at court** – you are given an appointment to go to court and complete a financial statement
- **warrant of execution** – the court bailiff enters your home and has power to seize goods to sell at auction to raise the money to pay your debt and any additional costs incurred.

The court fees for serving and carrying out these actions and our legal fees will be added to the amount you owe.

Debt collection agencies and tracing agencies

If you do not pay, we may ask a debt collection agency to recover your debt. We do not need a CCJ to do this.

We may also pass your account to a tracing agency if you move out of a property leaving a debt and do not give us a forwarding address. The tracing agency will use various resources to find you and then will contact you to arrange payment.

We will send a letter to the last address we had for you before we pass your debt to a third party. If you do not respond to this, the debt collection agency will contact you by letter, phone or text message and may visit you.

All the agencies we use (except Searchlight Collections which is in the BWBSL group of companies) are registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). They are also members of the Credit Services Association (CSA).

Please contact us immediately if you have a complaint about any agency acting on our behalf. We will investigate your concerns and compensate you under our enhanced guaranteed standards scheme if they have acted improperly.

Advice to tenants

Tenants are responsible for paying for the services we provide unless the landlord tells us otherwise. If your landlord has agreed to pay your water services charges for you, they must confirm this in writing to us.

If your landlord is responsible for the bill and we start to take debt recovery action against you because they have not paid, or if your bill is addressed to a previous tenant, please contact us straight away using the details on the back page.

If your rent includes a sum for your water services, this sum should reflect the amount we charge your landlord.

If you believe you are being charged too much for water by your landlord, you may be in a situation known as 'water resale'. You may wish to read a copy of the Water Resale Order, which is available from the industry regulator (Ofwat).

Priority Services

Sign up to our Priority Services register

If you, or anyone you know, needs extra support we can help through Priority Services. It offers:

- Help if your water supply gets interrupted
- Bills and leaflets in Braille, large print or other languages
- A password to protect against scam house calls.

It's free and easy to register.

Visit bristolwater.co.uk/priority-services



Further information

This leaflet forms part of our core customer information, covering key aspects of our work including charges, enquiries and complaints. Please contact us if you would like a copy of any of our leaflets. This document is available on request in other formats such as large print and languages other than English.

How to contact us

If you have a question about your bill including:

- payment arrangements
- problems paying
- metering
- moving house
- high water use
- rainwater drainage allowance
- Priority Services.

Call: **0345 600 3 600** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; Saturday, 9am to 1pm)

Submit an online enquiry: **bristolwater.co.uk/contact-us** **wessexwater.co.uk/contact-us**

Write: BWBSL, 1 Clevedon Walk, Nailsea, Bristol BS48 1WA

We welcome calls via the Relay UK and SignLive British Sign Language service.

Calls to 0345 numbers from UK landlines cost no more than calls to standard UK landline numbers. If you're calling from a mobile please check with your service provider as sometimes calls can cost more. We may record telephone calls into our contact centres for quality, security and training purposes.

Bristol Water and Wessex Water are not responsible for the content of external websites.