



Water and Sewerage Companies ,

5 January 2009

email: stella.creasy@scout.org.uk

Dear **Water and Sewerage Companies** ,

Re: Surface Area Water Charges

I am writing to you on behalf of The Scout Association to raise our concerns about proposals to charge community groups for surface water drainage and to seek the commitment of your company in principle to the need for an exemption for this charge for Britain's charitable groups.

As you will know, community groups and sports halls are not at present charged for disposal of the surface water that runs into sewers from their buildings. The decision in 2003 by OFWAT that this exemption should end by 2010 and the choice by some water companies to begin introducing these charges ahead of this deadline has substantial consequences for our Association. These new charges of up to £800-1000 can represent up to 33% of the annual budget for a Scout Group. Listed below are just there examples of where this policy is already having an adverse impact on our work with young people:

- The 1st Weston and Weston Point Scout Group in Cheshire are now being charged £564 per annum by United Utilities, which, when added to their metered water charges, accounts for around one third of their total annual budget.
- The 7th Congleton (Dane Valley) has experienced an increase in its water bill of £364 in 2008 year
- The 14th Southport (St James) has an increase in its water bill of £250 in 2008
- Our Groups are also reporting that these charges are often applied erroneously, with many of them current in dispute with Water companies about the rates for which they are eligible. Typical responses include "We spent 18 months disputing their billing, up to 04 January of this year, finally settling the account which (by then) totalled £805.98. Since the next bill we received (05 Jan-21 Apr) included

The Scout Association

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spurious charges (two un-associated properties) for surface water drainage, we are yet again in dispute and withholding payments."

These additional costs will force Scout Groups to restrict the activities they can offer to young people, whether that means spending less weekends camping and taking part in outdoor projects, or having to limit the number that can attend activity sessions. Some Scout Groups may also have to limit the support they provide to parents with the cost of uniform or subsidised activities that enables young people from a wide variety of backgrounds to participate in our Association. Scout Groups already undertake a great deal of fundraising in order to provide a fun and adventurous programme for all our members. Indeed, Groups will undoubtedly struggle to increase fundraising to meet these additional costs, especially with the current financial situation. We have already explored with our Groups measures that could help to mitigate these costs, including digging a soakaway or installing a rainwater recycling system. However, these systems often have a high initial cost, and Scout Groups simply do not have the capital to be able to fund such a one-off payment.

We should like to bring to your attention the enclosed letter from Severn Trent stating their company policy of an exemption from these charges for charities and community use buildings. As their letter explains they have tried to continue this scheme but have been refused permission to do so by OFWAT. We should like to invite you to advise us if your company would in its billing policy be willing to also offer such an exemption to charities and community use buildings, if enabled to do so by OFWAT. Taking such a stance would show your support as an organisation for the public benefit the Scouts and other charities offer communities in your area. We will of course ensure that our members, of whom there are 500,000 across every region in the country, are aware of your response to this proposal and your support for our position.

You may also be aware that the Government is now reviewing the guidance they have given to OFWAT regarding these charges. As we await the outcomes of this review, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss with your company how you could support our local Scout Groups in your area to help mitigate the negative impact of these charges and their implementation. If you would be willing to explore such action or require further information on the Scouts activities on this issue or to meet with representatives from The Scout Association please do contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns and we look forward to hearing from you,

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Stella Creasy
Head of Public Affairs and Campaigns

Enc. Letter 2nd December 2008 Severn Trent