

SCOUT ASSOCIATION CAMPAIGN TEAM

FEBRUARY 2009 MEMBER BRIEFING DOCUMENT



Date: 06/02/09

THE 'STOP THE RAIN TAX' CAMPAIGN: FEBRUARY 2009 UPDATE

The Story So Far....

If this is the first briefing you have received relating to changes in surface water drainage charges, you may wish to look at our previous briefings [here](#).

These give you the background information on charges for surface area water drainage and our actions so far in campaigning on this issue.

Reporting Back On Our Campaign To Date...

Last month we asked members of this campaign to email their local newspapers to raise awareness about the impact of these charges. Thank you for your efforts in raising awareness of our campaign and the issues we are currently facing. As a result our campaign has appeared in over 30 local news stories across the country.

The campaign has also hit the national headlines. You can see coverage here in The Daily Telegraph ([here](#) and [here](#)), The Independent ([here](#)) and on the BBC News website ([here](#) and [here](#)).

If you have not yet written to your local newspapers regarding these charges you can find a sample letter that you can send via email [here](#). This will automatically send your email to your local newspapers. If a story about the campaign has appeared in your local newspaper please let us know.

We also want to say thank you to everyone who has written to their MP on this issue. The last month has also seen the issue being raised in

parliament on at least 25 occasions, by MPs from each of the major political parties. You can find a list this activity, and the MPs who have taken part, [here](#).

Newsflash! United Utilities Freeze Charges!

The first sign our campaigning on this issue is making progress came this month when United Utilities, the water company for the North West of England, decided to freeze bills for next year so that Groups will not see any further increase in their costs until a longer term solution can be agreed for the costs of surface water drainage. In taking this action United Utilities highlighted the impact these charges were having on Scout Groups.

This moratorium on any further increases will apply automatically to the bills of affected customers. This shows that the water companies themselves wish to see a solution to this negative impact this charge will have on community groups across the country. It is vital that we keep up the pressure on OFWAT.

What Do Other Water Companies Say?

Last month we wrote to each of the Water Companies raising our concerns and asking them to outline their stance on the issue. You can read a summary of their responses online and see copies of all the letters and emails we have received from them [here](#).

The responses we have received show the confusion that exists amongst the Water

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The Scout Association

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email scout.association@scout.org.uk www.scouts.org.uk

Patron HM The Queen President HRH The Duke of Kent Founder Robert Baden-Powell OM Chief Scout Peter Duncan

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Companies on this issue. For example, some state they charge Scout properties as residential buildings, whilst others state they will not consider any changes to charges until 2010. If you can confirm, or refute, any of the points made, please do let us know so that we can take this up with the relevant company. You can find copies of all the correspondence between The Scout Association and the water companies on our campaign website

What Do OFWAT Say?

OFWAT have sent to us a copy of their correspondence with MPs that sets out their reasons for proposing these changes to how water is charged. Despite the now overwhelming evidence that many community groups, sports clubs and religious buildings will be severely affected by these charges they maintain that these charges are “the fairest and most environmentally responsible approach.”

In the letter OFWAT states that they “understand why community groups are concerned about rising bills” but point to the fact that “many charity shops have seen their SWD charges reduced”. They go on to suggest that to reduce bills customers should check that the water company’s estimate of chargeable site area is correct. This is something we are aware Scout Groups have struggled with, and would also be a lengthy process if all properties were to be visited. This also leaves the onus on Groups to challenge bills, rather than the water companies to charge a fair rate for services.

Finally OFWAT also suggest that community groups should reduce the amount of surface water that drains into the sewers. We know that our Members are keen to improve the environmental impact of their buildings too. However, our research shows that for many groups this would be impossible due to cost or space issues. Our survey of Groups show that only half of them had room for a “soakaway” with 39% of respondents saying they didn’t have the money or the space to dig such a facility. Other alternatives such as rainwater recycling facilities

were also prohibitively expensive. Therefore without financial assistance, Groups would not be able to follow OFWAT’s advice.

We believe that this letter and the case it makes reflect a lack of understanding by OFWAT of the nature of many community and charitable organisations and the implications of moving to this system of charging for them. We have asked OFWAT to set out what research or analysis they undertook to identify what the outcomes of such a move would be or how to help community groups and charities to mitigate these costs.

How Can We Solve This Problem? The Case for A Social Tariff For Community Groups

The confusion about the charges and how to implement them as expressed by the water companies highlights why there is a need to rethink these charges. But what would be a fair way to charge community groups and charities for their water services?

OFWAT state in their letter to MPs that it is not for them to “impose a social policy to exclude certain groups of customers from charges for services they receive”. However, already water companies **are** allowed to offer a “social tariff” or “vulnerable customer tariff” for those on low incomes or at risk of not being able to pay for water. These tariffs are permitted by both OFWAT and DEFRA guidance.

We believe that this creates a precedent for tariffs that recognise the impact of high charges on our local communities and society as a whole. Therefore, we want to see OFWAT and DEFRA extend this principle and allow water companies to charge a social or “vulnerable groups” tariff for organisations as well as individuals. Creating social tariffs for community groups and charities like Scout Groups, Churches and Sports Clubs would be the fairest way to charge these organisations for the services they receive.

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What Will Happen Next?

On your behalf we wrote to Huw Irranca-Davies, the Minister responsible for the review of the actions of the water regulator, OFWAT, to raise our concerns about these charges. He has responded saying that the Government are aware of the affordability issues that have been raised, and is looking at what can be done. In Parliament, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is undertaking a short inquiry into OFWAT's Price Review, including the affordability of water services. We will be submitting a report to the inquiry based on the information we have collated from members of The Scout Association on this issue and seeking to address the Committee on this issue directly.

Campaign Activity For Members in February

This month we would like to ask for your help with two campaign activities:

Action 1: Campaign for Scout Voices to be heard by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee in their Inquiry into Water Pricing

Check whether your MP is a member of the Committee on our [website](#). If he or she is you can find a draft letter [here](#) to send asking him or her to act as a member of the Committee and ensure The Scout Association is invited to give evidence to their inquiry into OFWAT's Price Review. If your MP is not a member of the Committee you can write to your local MP and ask them to lobby their colleagues on the committee (letter [here](#)) that it is important it addresses this issue.

Action 2: Tell OFWAT why we need a social tariff

We think OFWAT need to hear from you about the impact of forcing the water companies to change how they charge for surface area water drainage. You can find some sample text that you can copy and paste [here](#). You can email their Chief Executive Regina Finn directly on regina.finn@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk or write to her c/o Ofwat, Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham, B5 4UA.

We now have over 200 members signed up to help campaign on this issue - if you want to join our campaign please email water@scout.org.uk to receive campaign updates and please encourage your friends and fellow Scouts to participate too. On behalf of The Scout Association I would like to thank you for your help – together we can and we are making a difference through this campaign.

Stella Creasy
Head of Public Affairs and Campaigns
The Scout Association
020 8433 7215
stella.creasy@scout.org.uk

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