

Dear Ms Finn,

I am writing to you as a member of The Scout Association regarding the current issues around the changing method of charging community groups, religious buildings, sports clubs and Scout Association properties for surface water drainage.

Following on from your guidance to them, these charges have already been levied by some water companies. They have already had an enormous impact on the running of Scout Groups and are likely cause even more damage to Scouting as and when they are introduced across the rest of the country. These new charges of up to £800-£1000 can represent up to 33% of the annual budget for a Scout Group. For example, 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. This is a familiar story from many of our members; the 7th Congleton (Dane Valley) has experienced an increase of £364 this year and the 14<sup>th</sup> Southport (St James) has an increase of £250 this year. Whilst I recognise the steps that United Utilities have taken to try to address these increases, these are only a temporary measure and it is vital that a long term solution to the question of how best to charge for water services is found for the benefit of all water customers.

The Scout Association has written to all the water companies covering England and Wales to ask them about the introduction of these charges. The various water companies themselves have given a range of conflicting statements about how they interpret the relevant guidance from OFWAT. Some have stated that they must, and will, charge by site area, whereas others have stated that they will be making no changes to their method of charging by rateable value. This confusion about OFWAT's guidance, the charges and their implementation highlights why there is a need to rethink these charges.

If a solution is not found 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 canoeing sessions. Furthermore, some Scout Groups may have to limit the support they provide to parents with the cost of uniform or subsidised activities. Please note that each Scout Group is a separate local charity working within its own community and already undertakes a substantial amount of fundraising in order to provide a fun and adventurous programme for every young person who joins Scouting. Groups will undoubtedly struggle to increase fundraising to meet these additional costs, especially with the current financial situation.

I note that The Scout Association nationally has surveyed its members to see whether measures that could help to mitigate these costs, including digging a soakaway or installing a rainwater recycling system could be introduced. This survey found that 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. Many Groups also do not have the physical space at their properties for these to be introduced.

Given these problems, I would like to urge you to consider The Scout Association's proposal for a social tariff for organisations as well as individuals to help mitigate the negative social impact of these charges. This would extend the principle already created by the provisions OFWAT makes to allow water companies to charge particular tariffs for vulnerable groups. I urge you to engage directly with our Association representatives regarding this matter as well as working with DEFRA to find a solution that will ensure the financial survival of Scouting in our country for many years to come.

You can contact The Scout Association Campaigns team on 020 8433 7227 or [water@scout.org.uk](mailto:water@scout.org.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our concerns,