EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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Epsom & Ewell households drowning as water bills rise?

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Epsom & Ewell Residents Face Sharp Water Bill Hike as Regional Disparities Emerge

From April 2025, households in Epsom & Ewell will see a substantial increase in water bills, with Thames Water implementing a 31% rise. This means an additional £151 annually per household, increasing the average bill from £488 to £639. The rise places Thames Water among the highest increases across England, sparking significant concern among local residents and political representatives. Thames Water provides water and waste water services.

Local MP Slams Government's Inaction

Helen Maguire, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom & Ewell, has criticised the government's failure to regulate water companies more effectively. In a statement, she said:

> *"This is an outrageous bill rise. Instead of tackling Thames Water or taking them to task, the Government has given them free reign – and residents in Epsom & Ewell are paying the price. It's a disgrace that water companies have been able to hike our bills – a third of which goes on servicing debt – while they fail to fix leaks and pollute our rivers and streams like the River Mole and the Hogsmill."*

Maguire and the Liberal Democrats have urged the government to introduce a single social tariff to support vulnerable customers struggling to meet rising water costs.

Neighbouring Areas See Water Bill Decrease

In stark contrast, Sutton and East Surrey Water (SES Water), which serves areas including east Surrey, West Sussex, west Kent, and parts of south London, will reduce water bills by 2%, bringing the average bill down from £254 to £249. The decrease raises questions about why some suppliers are able to manage costs effectively while others, like Thames Water, continue to impose steep increases.

SES Water has not provided a detailed explanation for the reduction, but such adjustments typically stem from operational efficiencies, regulatory decisions, or improved cost management. SES provides water only services.

Where Thames Water Stands in the Rankings

According to a national comparison of 22 water companies, Thames Water ranks 5th in terms of the highest increase, making it one of the worst affected companies for bill hikes. The highest increase recorded is from Southern Water, while Sutton and East Surrey Water sits at the bottom of the list with the only decrease.

Continued Concerns Over Water Pollution

The significant bill increase for Thames Water customers comes amid growing concerns about water pollution in the region. In 2024, the River Mole suffered over 2,000 additional hours of pollution compared to 2023, worsening environmental and public health risks. Critics argue that rather than prioritising investment in infrastructure improvements, Thames Water's rising bills are being used to manage corporate debt and executive pay.

Thames Water on the Brink of Collapse

The sharp rise in Thames Water bills comes as the company teeters on the edge of financial collapse. The UK's largest water supplier, responsible for 15 million customers, has been struggling under a £15 billion debt burden and recently warned it could run out of money by May 2025. In an attempt to stabilise its finances, Thames Water had sought approval from the regulator, Ofwat, to impose a 59% bill increase over the next five years, far exceeding the 31% increase ultimately permitted this coming year. Meanwhile, the government has ruled out a public takeover of the company, despite growing concerns that a full-scale collapse could lead to severe service disruptions. The situation has reignited calls for tighter regulation of the water industry, with critics arguing that customers should not be forced to foot the bill for corporate mismanagement

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What Can Residents Do?

With these price hikes looming, residents are encouraged to explore available financial assistance options. Social tariffs, designed for low-income households, may offer some relief, though the inconsistency in eligibility criteria across different water providers remains a pressing issue.

Social tariffs are discounted water rates designed to assist low-income households in managing their water bills. Thames Water offers a social tariff program called **WaterHelp**. This scheme provides up to a 50% discount on annual water bills for eligible customers. Eligibility is determined by comparing the customer's water bill to their net household income and considering the number of occupants in the property. If the water bill exceeds 5% of the household's net income, the customer may qualify for the discount.

Additionally, Thames Water participates in the **WaterSure** programme, which caps bills for metered customers who meet specific criteria. To qualify, customers must receive means-tested benefits and either have a medical condition requiring increased water use or have three or more children under 19 living at home. For the 2024/25 period, the bill is capped at £471, ensuring that eligible customers do not pay more than this amount, regardless of actual water consumption.

These programmes aim to make water services more affordable for vulnerable customers, especially in light of rising water bills. Residents are encouraged to contact Thames Water directly or visit their website to assess eligibility and apply for these support schemes.

Local campaigners continue to push for greater accountability from water companies and regulatory bodies. The debate over water affordability, pollution control, and corporate responsibility is likely to remain a key issue for Epsom & Ewell residents as the April 2025 changes approach.

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