

From Saturday 1 October, water companies will take charge of many drainage systems which have previously been the responsibility of individual property owners. This is the fulfilment of a long standing Welsh Government commitment to remove the burden of maintenance on householders whose drainage systems had not been adopted by the water companies or their predecessors.

These changes, introduced in Wales by Environment Minister, John Griffiths, in July, will mean that householders will no longer be caught out by unexpected and often expensive bills, for the repair of broken, blocked or damaged sewers and the difficulties that occur where several properties are affected.

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and Severn Trent are both reviewing the current sewer network and have been working closely with local authorities and other stakeholders to gather information about their new assets. They have been planning for the likely increase in customer calls and to ensure the necessary emergency response and maintenance resources are available to ensure a smooth transition.

The cost to private sewer owners of these repairs is estimated at £221 million each year.

Environment Minister, John Griffiths said:

“Owners of private sewers and lateral drains – typically householders – have often been unaware of their associated responsibilities and liabilities, and there is no doubt that the repair and maintenance of private sewers can be very expensive.

“This transfer of private sewers and lateral drains is all about fairness for the consumer and ensuring that all homes connected to the public sewer system receive the same level of service.”

It is estimated that the cost to sewerage bill payers over the next three years would be between six to 27 pence a week. The final costs will reflect the situation on the ground and will vary between water companies. The timing of any increases in bills will be driven by when companies apply to Ofwat to increase prices.

Diane McCrea, Chair of the Wales Committee, Consumer Council for Water, said:

“CCWater supports the change in ownership for customers with private sewers when these transfer to water companies, as it will bring these customers future benefits by making expensive and unexpected bills for maintaining and repairing their private sewers a thing of the past.

“The industry does not know exactly how much this transfer will cost but it will come at a price. We will work closely with the water regulator, Ofwat, and the water and sewerage companies to ensure costs are spread over an appropriate period of time and challenge companies to minimise the impact on water bills.”

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water managing director Nigel Annett said:

“We welcome this transfer of private sewers as a big step forward in customer service, and one that will lead to more effective management of the sewerage network. Thousands of people in our area will no longer have to worry about repairs and maintenance of drains and sewers that until now have been privately owned.

“The transfer of 17000 kms of private sewers and drains will double the size of the network Welsh Water operates, so it’s a massive additional responsibility. The size of the transfer inevitably means that we won’t be able to fix all problems immediately. It’s going to take time and we will have to prioritise work so that the most urgently needed repairs are dealt with first. But we will do our best to tackle all problem areas as quickly as we can.

“As a not-for-profit water company our only purpose is to do our best for customers and our environment. The transfer of private sewers will bring great long-term benefits to our customers and the area we serve.”

Allan Warren, general manager for Severn Trent, said:

“It’s a positive step for everyone. Often customers don’t realise which bit of the waste pipe is their responsibility to maintain or repair until something goes wrong and they’re faced with a costly bill. Problems on shared pipes have even gone unfixed while neighbours dispute the

costs. Now when customers have a blocked or collapsed drain or sewer, it's that much clearer who will be responsible for repairs."