

Thames Water Trust Fund



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THAMES WATER TRUST FUND 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Celebrating a decade of support
for water customers in financial hardship



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10th Anniversary



Background

“They were so understanding of our situation, that I am still moved today.”

So says James, one of thousands of customers in vulnerable circumstances who have been helped by us since 2009.

The Thames Water Trust Fund is an independent grant making trust first established in 2009. A registered charity with the aim of helping customers of Thames Water who are in difficult circumstances and are struggling to afford their charges.

Often the customers helped cannot afford to pay for essential household items such as; washing machines, cookers, fridges, freezers, beds, household bills or other costs. Awards are made to deliver an immediate impact to the customer. Grants are also made to local organisations that are able to offer long-term support to people living in the Thames Water region who are in hardship, by providing debt and money advice services.

Whilst supporting people with these essential items and providing organisational grants is crucial – to alleviate water poverty we must also tackle water debt – requiring financial support with repaying arrears. This is why the Trust Fund works with partners and is closely associated with the Thames Water Customer Assistance Fund (CAF) who help customers reduce their water debt.





Support

Growing levels of household debt in the UK means that each year the Trust Fund is responding to increasing numbers of vulnerable people who struggle financially.

Since the start in 2009, over 24,000 applications have been received from vulnerable people applying for help with relief from financial hardship.

Last year the Thames Water Trust Fund provided **1,100 beneficiaries** with financial support. Together with the CAF, **over 6,500 people were helped** to get their life back on track in 2018 alone.

A celebration of the Trust Fund

Now celebrating ten years of existence, and having turned into a mature and impactful charity, it's time to reflect on the goals and achievements to date; the event taking place at Walthamstow Wetlands in July 2019 is to applaud the success and discuss the future of the Trust Fund.

This 10th anniversary milestone provides the opportunity to remember some of the key successes in the last 10 years; from the thoughts of people who have received support services in the past – to the commitment from the dedicated Trustees. Since 2009 Auriga Services, a public benefit entity service provider, has administered the Trust Fund and the Thames Water CAF.

This milestone and the celebration activity will help further engagement with wider partners, key to supporting those who are in financial hardship - and secure the funding and assistance needed to continue to deliver effective support in the future, to enable people to achieve positive changes in their lives.

Impact

In 2017, the Trust Fund commissioned a major piece of research into the impact of the support for social good with Ecorys UK. The results from that report clearly showed the massive impact that the Trust Fund awards have on individuals and their families.

Facts about people seeking help with water debt over the last 10 years in the Thames area:

On average people seeking help with bills have £837 of water arrears and 80% identify that their money concerns cause additional vulnerability on top of their financial difficulties.

Renters are more likely to be struggling with arrears compared to those with mortgages or who owned their property outright. Overall, over 57% of our beneficiaries rent their home from a housing association.

Households with no children are more likely to seek support with their bills. 58% of beneficiaries had no children and only 8% of beneficiaries were from households containing three or more children: less than the national average of 15%.

A household with one person living alone is most likely to be in arrears on their water bill. 77% of successful applications are from households containing only one adult.

Those on lower incomes are most likely to be falling behind on their water bill.

19% of households included a disabled person.

This evaluation highlights the determination of the Trust Fund to reduce households living in financial hardship, and demonstrates key achievements over the past 10 years.

A Fresh Start

83% of people supported believed that the help they received, together with assistance from Thames Water, improves their ability to pay water bills going forwards. For many of the beneficiaries, the award or payment from Thames Water gave them the opportunity to have a “clean slate” or “fresh start” through which they could start to organise their other finances.

Joined Up Support

74% of survey respondents feel more confident managing their bills in the future after receiving support. Giving people a fresh start with their water arrears offers them breathing space to reconsider their finances.

One of the benefits of integrating the support with Thames Water assistance is that a holistic and more sustained solution to financial problems is provided; 63% of beneficiaries feel that the support they received from Thames Water with their water payments helped them to pay other essential bills such as gas, electricity, telephone or council tax. In addition, 34% believed support helped them to start paying off any other debts; for example: credit cards, overdraft charges and bank or payday lender loans.

“Once the water problem was neutralised, I thought: ‘Let’s look at other bills and plan what to do with them. Ever since then I have not defaulted. I have debts, but I am keeping on top of them. Dealing with the water bill was a watershed. Massive.”

- Beneficiary

Addressing Vulnerability

Debt and Mental Health

Thames Trust Fund Chair Linda Perham said: “Over the last 10 years, we have seen an increase in the complexity of the issues which beneficiaries report, particularly in relation to underlying mental health problems.

According to the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute almost half – 46% – of all people in debt said they also faced a mental health problem.”

On a positive note, many individuals report a number of encouraging mental health outcomes as a result from support by the Trust Fund. More than half (58%) of beneficiaries report their mental health has improved since receiving support from the Trust Fund or Thames Water assistance, with 35% adding that the mental health of their partner or family had also improved.

“Stress makes you more introverted and less patient, because you are always thinking about that debt. It was difficult not having the freedom to do things with the children... Now I can budget more and with some financial planning I can do activities with the children, so I’m less stressed about that.”

- Beneficiary

The white goods or furniture provision from the scheme are a valued means for improving customers’ lives and physical health. Provision of a fridge-freezer enables households to store fresh and frozen food for longer and prepare ‘proper’ meals which improve their standard of living and quality of life. Sleep is another outcome mentioned by a number of our beneficiaries.

For example:

“My body does not ache as much now that I sleep on a bed.” – Beneficiary

Society is changing; there is greater awareness of vulnerability and debt. Financial stress is still a reality for many and we strongly believe that support for water customers in vulnerable circumstances is paramount.

Christine Drury, Thames Trust Fund Trustee said *“I’m extremely proud of our work over the last 10 years. There is clearly a mismatch between the number of people in serious debt and the level of support available. We know 75% of the people who receive our support say their bills and debt would have got worse without help from the Trust Fund. Only 9% of the people we’ve helped say they’ve received any other support to reduce their financial problems.”*

83% of people supported believed that the help they received, together with assistance from Thames Water, helps their ability to pay water bills going forwards. For many of the beneficiaries, the award or the payment from Thames Water allowed them the opportunity to have a “clean slate” or “fresh start” through which they could start to organise their other finances.



Abdal Ullah a Trustee of the charity commented *“The barriers and issues that exist for people in debt are wider than those they face in the utility sector. It will take government, organisations and businesses who serve consumers, as well as advice and financial providers to look inwards at their own strategies.”*

Achievements

The Trust Fund support in combination with the Thames Customer Assistance Fund has created an estimated £3.75 of benefits for every £1 invested in the schemes overall. Around £20 million of social benefits have also been provided as a result of combined support; highlighting the substantial good arising from the schemes, and more than justifies the investment.

The following case study demonstrates the type of situation beneficiaries may be in and how the Trust Fund works to support individuals at risk and or experiencing financial worries.

Case study: Shauna*

Facts

Shauna's husband was abusive towards her and had substance abuse issues; the family income was spent on cocaine. She has three children aged 2, 9 and 11 and the state of crisis had a serious impact on them.

Fearful for their safety, Shauna moved into a refuge, however, she and her family were evicted as one of her children attempted to start a fire.

Shauna has now removed herself from the situation and her partner is in prison. She lives alone and her children are in the care of social services. She contacted Thames Water and the Trust Fund as she was unable to pay

her bills, arrears have accrued and her washing machine had broken and leaked water.

Action

She was interested in accessing support as a means of sustaining herself and meeting the costs of bills. Shauna was provided with a new washing machine by the Trust Fund and support with bills from Thames Water.

Outcome

Shauna is healthy and safe; she has been able to sustain her tenancy, can wash her clothes adequately and meet her bill repayments.

*Please note the name has been changed to protect the victim's identity.

Organisational grants

Organisational grants are available to expand the reach of the Trust into local communities. The services provided by projects meet the advice needs of households who are struggling financially and generate opportunities for voluntary work.

In the last 10 years 67 grants have been awarded to support projects in over 30 organisations, with a combined value of £2.6 million. This funding has created 63 jobs and more than 200 volunteering opportunities. The services delivered by these projects have reached over 30,000 individuals and provided invaluable funding streams for local organisations.

Jill Harrison, CEO
@ Citizens Advice Enfield

The funding from the Thames Water Trust Fund totally transformed Enfield Citizens Advice's ability to deal with customers who have problem debt and doubled our charity's money advice staffing! This meant we were able to offer clients more detailed support with their water debt, making more applications to the Customer Assistance Fund and Watersure Schemes. Staff have developed much greater expertise in managing water debt as a result and improved the quality of our work in this area, as our volunteers have been able to shadow experienced advisers and learn from them.

Claire Newport, Chief Executive
Citizens Advice Swindon

The funding received from the Thames Water Trust Fund for the 'Debt Solutions on Tap' project has made a huge difference to the lives of our clients living in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Swindon. The continued welfare reform changes continue to have a huge impact on our client base especially with the full rollout of Universal Credit. This funding has helped us target families with water debt in desperate need of support with their money worries. It has meant that we can open and expand our services to meet the demand and we were also able to offer paid employment to an existing volunteer.



Looking forwards

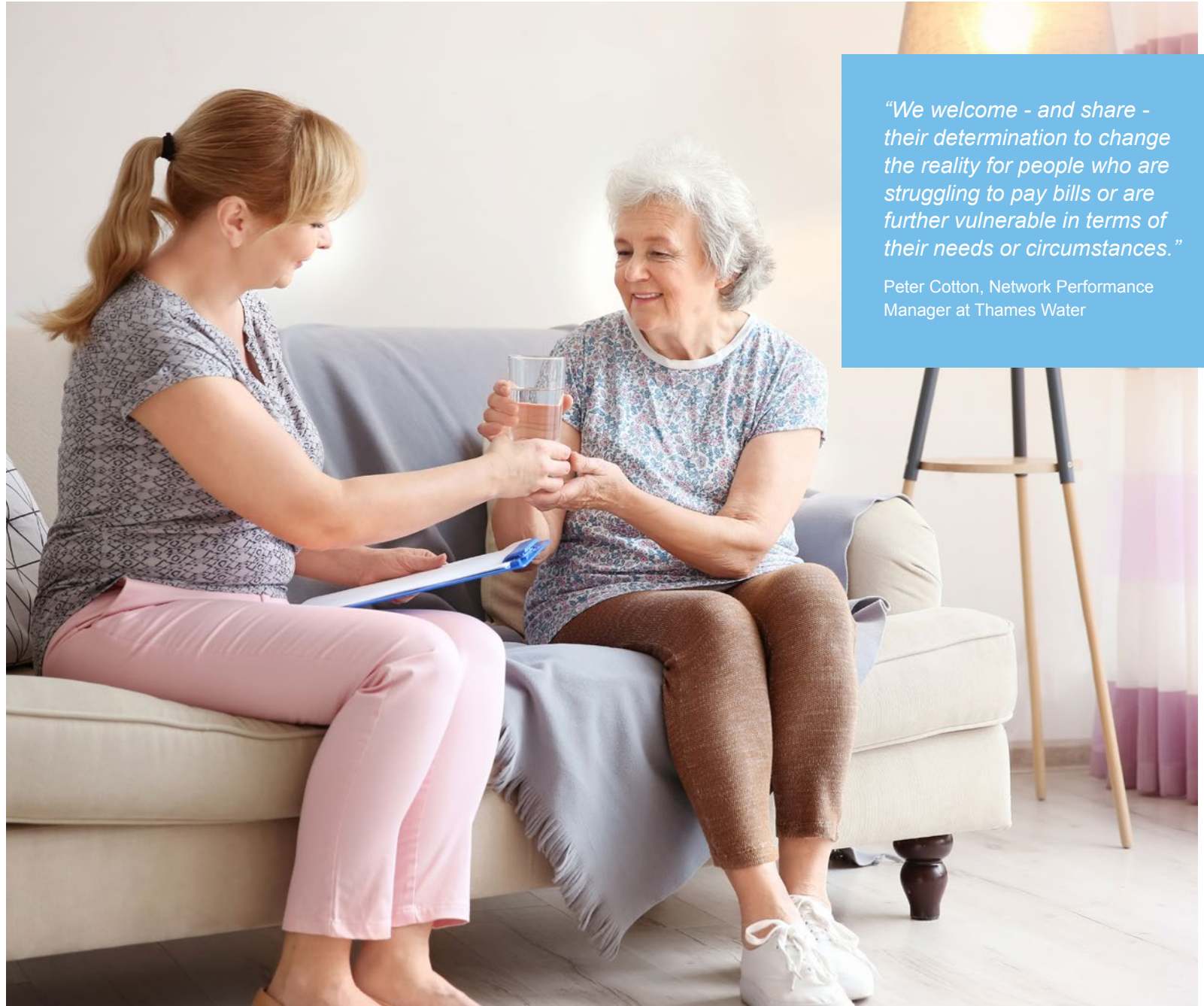
Peter Cotton, Customer Propositions Manager at Thames Water, leading on customer assistance said:

"I would like to congratulate the Thames Water Charitable Trust Fund on their 10th anniversary. We welcome - and share - their determination to change the reality for people who are struggling to pay bills or are further vulnerable in terms of their needs or circumstances. There's a lot to be done, but by working collectively, we can get the best outcomes for water consumers and reduce water debt."

Linda Perham, Chair of the Trust Fund said:

"I have enjoyed wonderful support from my fellow Trustees past and present, all of whom have been committed to shaping our strategic direction to achieve the vision. All the employees at Auriga Services have been great to work with. Without their dedication, hard work and expertise we could not possibly be in the strong and respected position we are now. They are a very special team."

"My final acknowledgement goes to Thames Water for their generous donations and support with the Trust Fund. It's a real privilege to work with them, there's a lot more to be done to meet the needs of customers in vulnerable circumstance and together we plan to achieve greater levels of collective social impact."



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Peter Cotton, Network Performance Manager at Thames Water