

REPORT TO: School Forum
DATE: 16th October 2014
REPORTING OFFICER: Finance Officer, Financial Management Division
SUBJECT: Excessive Water Charges

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report to the School Forum the information we have received in relation to water charges across the North West in comparison to other regions.

2.0 Recommendation

RECOMMENDED: That the report is noted and, that School Forum agrees, all schools are encouraged to write using the template letter to OFWAT. Also that School Forum agrees that a letter is sent to OFWAT from them.

3.0 Background

Sefton Council have been investigating for a while and they have noticed that schools in the North West are charged a significantly higher rate for sewerage/water compared to other areas. The Authority received an email from Sefton detailing their findings and the process they are now taking in order to try and reduce these costs.

- 3.1 Water service companies are able to charge differently for different parts of the bills they send out. In the North West a method that is proportional to the surface area of the school is used (which in the case of some schools is a considerable amount) and this is how United Utilities choose to bill our schools. Although it is legal to charge us so, it seems unfair that North West schools should be charged at such a higher rate than those of other areas in order to maintain the running of their schools. For example in 2012-13 North West schools paid about £27,000,000 for the year, whereas in the South East (which has similar numbers of schools and pupils) they paid only £11,000,000. Therefore the North West region paid £16,000,000 more in water fees. Obviously this will have an adverse effect on the amount of money that schools will have available to spend on pupils.
- 3.2 Although Sefton produced letter templates to United Utilities, it was suggested at the recent North West LMS Officers meeting that the letters should be sent to OFWAT instead, as it is felt that this will get more consideration. We have included a standard template letter. We have already prepared this template with the information for each school so that it can be emailed out for schools to personalise before sending on to OFWAT.