

POLICY

Financial Management – DEBTORS – Water Usage from Undetected Leaks

Date adopted by Council	22 February 2021
Minute number	H 02.1
Endorsed by	Council
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Due for review	September 2022
Related documents	INT-26238/16
Responsible officer	Manager Finance
Department/Section	Corporate Services
Category	Financial & Asset Management
Community Strategic Plan goal	Goal 8 Provide Community leadership
	CS 35 Ensure long-term financial sustainability through short, medium and long term financial planning



Policy Statement

This Policy is intended to provide some financial relief for customers who have experienced a sudden increase in water consumption due to circumstances that were not reasonably foreseeable.

Financial relief under this policy would only be available under certain circumstances where all the criteria has been satisfied.

The policy is also intended to serve as a means of good public relations by providing 'one off' assistance where a significantly higher quarterly usage has occurred beyond the landowner's/occupier's control.

Council has adopted this policy as there is no provision is relevant in the Local Government Act 1993 to reduce water accounts due to water leaks in private water services.

The policy only applies to water consumption and sewer usage charges, which are based on water consumption.

Objective

The objective of this policy is to provide financial relief under certain circumstances to the owner/occupier of a property, in situations where high quarterly water consumption has been registered through the meter, due to circumstances judged by Council to be beyond the control of the land owner/occupier to detect.

Scope

This policy applies to the providing financial relief to eligible owner/occupiers of a property that have experienced an unexpected excessive increase in water usage for no apparent reason due to undetected water leakages.

Definitions

All terms used in this policy have the standard dictionary definition.

Policy Details

The following procedures and criteria must be satisfied when assessing the eligibility for financial relief for excessive water usage:

Procedural Fairness

This policy applies to a narrow set of criteria, and should not be enacted in cases where a landholder could reasonably have detected and repaired a water leak on premises before incurring an increased water charge.

The allowance is a 'one off' concession.



Other Notes

High readings are checked by the meter readers with photographic evidence of the reading, high consumption is also checked by the revenue officer during the billing run. If a reading is incorrect the account is adjusted and a new bill is issued. If a functional problem with the meter is suspected it is replaced. Customers can have their meter tested at their costs, which is refundable if the meter is found to be faulty.

Criteria

Council will give consideration to adjusting a high water account under the following circumstances:

- a. The defect causing the high reading was not readily visible or apparent and could be reasonably judged by Council as not being detectable. If leakage is visible as ground surface moisture, dampness, lush grass or water flow, it is detectable and ineligible for financial relief.

An undetectable leak which is not visible, is defined as a pipeline or connection break in the ground or under concrete slabs, between the Council meter and the main building, it does not include leaks from internal building service lines, appliances or irrigation systems.
- b. The leak was not due to the neglect of obvious defects in the private water line.
- c. The leak was not caused by any type of construction or earthworks being carried out.
- d. The quarterly consumption is more than double the average consumption for the same period over the previous three years and there has been no identifiable change in water use on the property such as that resulting from the installation of a swimming pool, spa or irrigation system.
- e. The applicant must be the owner or part owner or the person liable for the water charges for which the application applies.
- f. The application for adjustment must be received prior to any further water consumption bills being issued.
- g. Only a one-off concession will be granted in perpetuity of ownership of the property.
- h. In order to be eligible for the account adjustment, the property owner/occupier shall make best efforts to:



- i. Advise Council about the issue and problem identified
 - ii. Provide evidence that immediate and effective action has been taken to rectify the problem
 - iii. Provide a written statement stating the reason why the leak was not detected or could not have been detected and action taken to rectify
- i. This policy does not apply to leaks from private water pipelines that occur outside the property boundary.
 - j. If Council notifies an owner/occupier about any leakage, such leakage is considered detectable and ineligible for financial relief under this policy, unless the owner is absent from the property.
 - k. The property has been vacant for an extended period.

The adjustment will be made by calculating the average daily consumption for the same period over the last 3 years. This average will be used to calculate the new total consumption for the billing period in question. No adjustment will be made if there are any outstanding amounts owing for water or sewer usage.

Applying the policy

The General Manager or Director of Corporate and Community Services are authorised to approve applications for financial relief under this policy.

Claims must be made in writing.

Where financial assistance is granted the applicant will be advised in writing and a new account will be issued. Payment of the amended account will be due within 30 days of the date of the advice.

If financial assistance is not granted the applicant will be advised in writing and be given a further 30 days from the date of the advice to pay the account or make a suitable arrangement for payment of the account.

Responsibilities

Council Standing Committee

Council will review and endorse the Policy.

Director

The Director Corporate Services will act as per Delegations of Authority.

Manager

The Manager Finance will adhere to the Policy.

Coordinators and Supervisors

The Senior Revenue Officer and Revenue Officer will adhere to the Policy.



References and Related Legislation

1. Previously adopted policy by Council dated September 2016

Version History

Version No.	Date	Reason for Review
1	01/02/21	Policy expiry date due for review.