

Sewers and Drains..... who is responsible?

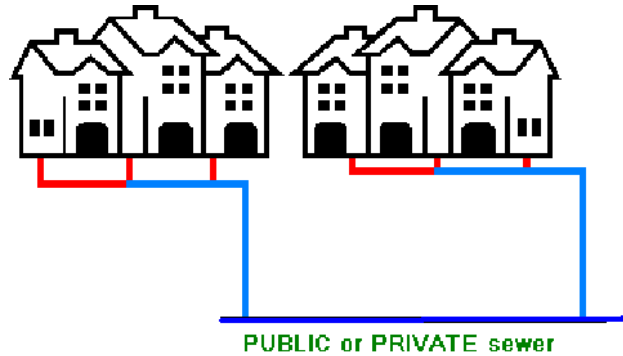
When sewers and drains become blocked there is often confusion about who should take action particularly when it comes to paying the bill!

The cost of dealing with blocked or defective drainage is not covered by water rates or council tax nor do sewage charges from Thames or Southern Water cover maintenance of private sewers or drains.

What's the difference between a drain and a sewer?

A Drain- is a pipe which carries waste from ONE property (shown in red)

A Sewer- is a pipe that carries waste from more than one property, such as where drains from several properties join together. (shown in blue)



Who owns a Drain?

Drains legally belong to the owner of the property they are connected to, even if they go under someone else's land or a road. The owner is generally responsible for maintaining or unblocking them when there are problems.

Who owns a Sewer?

Sewers are either **PRIVATE** or **PUBLIC**.

PUBLIC SEWERS are those which have been adopted by the sewerage undertaker –either Thames or Southern Water in the Sevenoaks District.

These are sewers that have been adopted either by agreement or because the sewer existed before the 1st October 1937.

If problems occur then Thames or Southern Water are responsible

PRIVATE SEWERS are those which have not been adopted by the sewerage undertaker.

Owners of properties connected to the private sewer share responsibility for its maintenance.

If a blockage or defect occurs it is the owners or occupiers upstream of the problem who are responsible.

What if my drainage becomes blocked?

Firstly, try and find out if anyone else is affected. Where possible get them to check manhole covers and drainage gulleys on their property. Slow draining sinks or toilets and unpleasant sewage odour are other signs of a blockage.

Clearing a blocked Drain

If you are sure it's only your property that's affected, you will probably need to contact a drain clearing specialist or contractor such as those listed in your local phone directory or on the internet. Small blockages may also be cleared by an individual with rods, although care must be taken to ensure that damage to the pipe does not occur and that rods do not break off in the pipe.

Clearing a blocked Sewer

If you are sure that several properties are affected, it may be the sewer (shared drainage pipe) that is causing the problem.

- Contact either Thames Water or Southern Water (depending on location).
 - Advise the customer service representative of the problem
 - Ask them to check the location of the nearest public sewer
 - Advise them if your property was built before 1st October 1937 (if known)
 - Ask if any other complaints have been recently received and if these have been investigated
 - If located close to your property ask if the sewer can be checked to ensure that it is flowing freely

NB- Thames and Southern Water may advise that if the blockage is found to be within a private sewer a call out charge may be applied. They may also agree to clear a blockage in a private drain close to a public sewer for a nominal charge (this charge may represent a significant saving from the cost of independently employing a contractor)

If the blockage is not within the **PUBLIC SEWER**

- contact your neighbours who are being affected by the problem
 - arrange with them to clear the problem and share the cost.
 - Drain and sewer problems **may** be covered by your buildings insurance (check with your insurers)
 - Look for Drainage Contractors in local directories (ring around prices vary)
 - **Remember to check**
 - Is there a call out fee?
 - What the cost is likely to be?
 - The cost of any other work (e.g. digging up the pipe)?
- Where possible discuss the costs and problem with your neighbours before selecting a contractor

When does the District Council become Involved?

The District Council have a policing role with regards drainage. If neighbours are confused about their responsibilities or can not agree to do works to either a drain or a private sewer which poses a risk to public health, the Environmental Health Team can;

- investigate,
 - clarify responsibilities,
 - legally require works be done (serve a statutory notice)
- if repairs are still not completed we can
- undertake works in default
 - recharge residents the costs incurred (including administration) and/or
 - take residents to court for not complying with a statutory notice

Further information is available from:

Environmental Protection Team, Community and Planning Services, Sevenoaks District Council, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG tel: 01732 227000 fax 01732 742339 email: environmental.protection@sevenoaks.gov.uk web: <http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk>

Thames Water: 08459 200 800

Southern Water: 0845 278 0845