

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

ESSEX & SUFFOLK
WATER *living water*

OUR ASSURANCE PLAN SUMMARY 2020/21

Checks we'll make to protect
your services



ABOUT US

Northumbrian Water (NW) and Essex & Suffolk Water (ESW) are both part of Northumbrian Water Limited. Northumbrian Water provides water and wastewater services to 2.7 million people in North East England. Essex & Suffolk Water provides water services to 1.5 million people in Essex and 0.3 million people in Suffolk.

OUR ASSURANCE PLAN AND WHAT IT MEANS

This plan tells you the checks we'll make throughout the year to ensure we deliver on our promises to you and report on them accurately. It also tells you how we plan to reduce any risks and weaknesses in our business that might affect the services we provide and your confidence in us. This is something we do every year.

There are two versions of this document. This is the shorter, summary version. [Click here](#) to read the full Assurance Plan for 2020/21.

WHY DO WE NEED AN ASSURANCE PLAN?

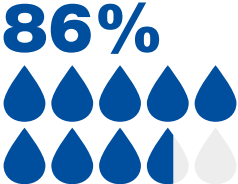
It's really important that we have tough measures in place to show how the company is run and that the correct procedures and policies are being followed. This means our employees, customers and stakeholders can trust we are responsible, we behave ethically and the way we report company and financial information is reliable.



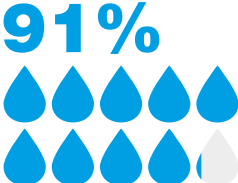
HOW CUSTOMERS AND STAKEHOLDERS HAVE INFLUENCED THIS PLAN

Customers and stakeholders have helped us to create this Assurance Plan to make sure it tells them what they want to know in a way that is easy to understand.

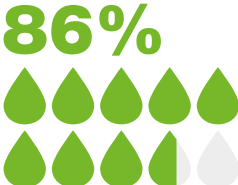
We emailed more than half a million customers and stakeholders in December 2019, inviting them to read our draft Assurance Plan and complete a survey to give us their views on the contents. We were delighted to receive more than 6,500 responses.



of our customers are confident that the information we publish will be correct and true.



of our customers say our plans to be a company you can trust are clear.



of our customers would not add anything further to the draft plan.

Where appropriate, the suggestions customers and stakeholders gave us in the survey have been used to complete our full Assurance Plan for 2020/21. This document is a summary of that Plan.



YOU SAID, WE RESPONDED

“ YOU SAID...

You told us that we needed to be clearer about how charges are set and how we protect customers from bill increases – especially those who are struggling financially.

“ WE RESPONDED...

We've included more detail in this plan. Take a look on **page 6**.



OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Our stakeholders, including The Water Forum (an independent group set up to challenge the company on behalf of customers), help keep us in check and we regularly ask them to review what we do. When they looked at our draft Assurance Plan they agreed with customers, saying that our procedures are robust and relevant.

“ YOU SAID...

The aim of this summary is to keep information simple, to avoid bombarding customers with too much information. However, some of you told us you wanted more detail around policies and procedures.

“ WE RESPONDED...

We've added web links throughout this plan so you can easily find out more about any areas of interest.



ASSURANCE PLAN SUMMARY

HOW WE PROVE WE ARE DELIVERING

OUR REGULATOR AND OTHER AUDITORS

Water companies in England go through tough checks by the water regulator Ofwat to make sure you can trust the information they provide.

Various other people check that we are running the company properly – our Board, Executive Leadership Team, Internal Audit Team and expert independent auditors, to name just a few. Performance commitments we made in our Business Plan are regularly checked to make sure we are on target.

INDUSTRY AWARDS

A series of awards in 2019 provide further evidence of our strong performance and efforts to support customers.

We are the only water company in the world – and one of only two UK companies – to be named on the World's Most Ethical Company List.

Two water industry awards include: Best Customer Service Initiative for our [Water Without the Worry](#) campaign, which encourages customers who need extra support to sign up for priority services, and Best Data Project for our Water Poverty Eradication Modelling. This system enables us to target areas likely to have the most customers struggling to pay their water bills. To see if you're eligible for help with your bills, [click here](#).

Our efforts to minimise pollution of rivers and coastal waters also earned us praise as sector leaders by the Environment Agency.

OUR APPROACH TO PROVIDING SERVICES

We are a local monopoly, but wherever possible we behave as if we are not. We treat our customers as if they could choose to buy their water elsewhere because we want to provide world-class customer service.

To see how well we perform compared to other water companies, visit www.discoverwater.co.uk.



OUR AREAS OF FOCUS

We will focus on the following areas in 2020/21 to make sure we manage risks in our business and continue to provide you with the best possible services.



AREA OF FOCUS: **DRINKING WATER QUALITY**

The drinking water we supply must meet strict quality standards and we routinely score very high levels of compliance – greater than 99.9%. We are committed to improving the small number of water samples that fail tests for lead, iron, nickel and taste and smell. These failures do not put any of our customers' health at risk.

WE WILL CHECK:

- Investment continues to improve our water treatment works and network of water pipes;
- Our water treatment process is carefully managed to make sure the drinking water we supply is high quality, and
- Water sample testing continues to monitor drinking water quality.

AREA OF FOCUS: **BILLS**

We want water and wastewater services to be affordable for all our customers, whatever their circumstances. To check how we set charges in more detail, read about our [**Charges Schemes**](#).

WE WILL CHECK:

- We follow, and strive to improve on, guidance around charges set by our regulator Ofwat;
- We publish how we set charges for our services every April in our Charges Statement, and
- We follow our tried and tested process for setting and checking our charges every year.

Find out more about our discounts and payment plans which offer Water Without the Worry [**here**](#).

AREA OF FOCUS:
**GUARANTEED STANDARDS
SCHEME (GSS)**

We believe world-class service is about getting it right first time, every time. We must meet certain standards by law (however, we aim to improve on many of these, and include others that we believe demonstrate an unrivalled customer experience). If things go wrong and we don't meet these legal standards, we have to compensate the customer affected. You can find out about our guaranteed standards [here](#).

WE WILL CHECK:

- The way we find, report and issue GSS payments continues to work well, and
- Our system for enhanced compensation, which pays more than standard levels, is fit for the future. We are reviewing this now.

AREA OF FOCUS:
DATA PROTECTION

Information about our customers (personal data) is one of our most valuable assets. Whenever we use this data, we are committed to protecting your privacy rights. Respecting those rights, and meeting our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is essential to our reputation as an ethical and trustworthy company.

WE WILL CHECK:

- Personal data is only used when we have a specified, explicit and legitimate reason to do so;
- It is kept accurate, up-to-date and protected and only retained for as long as we need it. It is then disposed of promptly and securely, and
- Personal data is retained inside the European Economic Area, unless privacy rights are adequately protected in the receiving country.

For full details of our Privacy policy [click here](#).

AREA OF FOCUS:
CYBER SECURITY

We know customers are worried about cyber-attacks and want to know more about how we prioritise keeping our computer systems safe.

As a critical national infrastructure company, we have a duty to adhere to the Networking and Information Systems Directive to ensure that we can secure the way we produce and distribute your tap water. The National Cyber Security Centre gives us updates on cyber security risks, the Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure updates us on terrorist activity, and the MetOffice gives us advance weather reports.

WE WILL CHECK:

- A robust cyber security culture is embedded across all areas of the organisation and our Board reviews and approves our cyber security policy;
- Employees are clear and take seriously their responsibility to keep systems and information safe, by giving them frequent awareness training and guidance on cyber security, password controls and system permission levels;
- The security of all computer systems and infrastructure is managed, with old equipment and information disposed of securely, and
- Critical information systems are protected from the effects of major failures or disasters.



AREA OF FOCUS:
ONLINE INFORMATION

Customers need to be able to trust the information they read on our websites.

WE WILL CHECK:

- We have a strict process for checking key information posted on our websites, and
- Existing information on our websites is checked frequently so it isn't out of date or incorrect.

AREA OF FOCUS:
OUR FINANCES

Like many water companies, we are privately owned and have shareholders who invest money to make a profit. We also borrow money to finance our investments. We openly share information about how we are financed on our websites.

WE WILL CHECK:

- Our Annual Report and Financial Statements and Regulatory Financial Statements are posted on our websites every year, and
- An independent external company has reviewed and verified the financial information we provide.

AREA OF FOCUS:
RESILIENT SERVICES

Our customers expect resilient services, which means they are strong, reliable, affordable, and stand the test of time. If they can't bounce back from difficult and unexpected situations, customers will lose faith in us.

WE WILL CHECK:

- We continue to deliver reliable services by anticipating change, planning ahead and making the right long-term decisions;
- Robust processes are in place to ensure we meet the expectations of our customers and the regulator when it comes to resilience;
- Resilience is managed across our business with the appointment of the water industry's first Chief Resilience and Sustainability Officer who will oversee a newly developed Resilience Action Plan, and
- Principal risks to our business are published in our [**Annual Report and Financial Statements**](#).



AREA OF FOCUS:
REPORTING IT RIGHT

It's really important that the company information we report is accurate, audited and assured.

Many of our targets can earn us financial rewards if we beat them or penalties if we fail to meet them.

WE WILL CHECK:

- Strict procedures are used for collecting data on our performance, and
- Our Water Forum – our customer challenge group – scrutinise our performance information.



AREA OF FOCUS:
INFORMATION FOR OFWAT

We provide specific information to our regulator Ofwat, so it can fairly compare all water companies. Called cost assessment tables, these reports include information on renewable energy and how much water we have stored.

WE WILL CHECK:

- We have strict procedures for collecting, reporting and testing data on energy, water and wastewater activities so that information reported is accurate and complete, and
- A Water Resources Management Plan is updated regularly to ensure we have a sufficient and secure supply of water to meet demand and that information is transferred to cost assessment tables accurately.

AREA OF FOCUS:
OUR AMBITIOUS TARGETS

We have some extremely stretching performance targets for the next five years and are starting to plan how we will achieve them. Our ambitious goals include achieving zero water poverty by 2030 and net zero carbon emissions by 2027.

WE WILL CHECK:

- Investment made in new pipes, pumping stations, treatment stations and equipment;
- Customer service is improved by working with feedback from customers;
- New, innovative ways of working are developed, and
- There's a dramatic increase in the number of customers we provide with priority services, for example customers who need extra support with passwords.

Read more about our ambitious goals in our [**Business Plan**](#).

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

ESSEX&SUFFOLK
WATER *living water*

Northumbrian Water Limited
Northumbria House
Abbey Road
Pity Me
Durham
DH1 5FJ

www.nwl.co.uk | www.eswater.co.uk | www.nwg.co.uk