

A person is seen from behind, holding a white cup, looking out a window. A baby is visible through the window, smiling and covering their mouth with their hands. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

FOR EVERYONE

Our customer inclusivity strategy 2025-30

**NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER** *living water*

**ESSEX & SUFFOLK
WATER** *living water*

1. INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce our updated Inclusivity Strategy - an important step in our commitment to making sure every customer, colleague, and community we serve feels valued, heard, and supported.

Our Purpose is rooted in a clear commitment: caring for the essential needs of our communities and environment, now and for generations to come. We do this by providing reliable and affordable water and wastewater services for our customers. We make a positive difference by operating efficiently and investing prudently, to maintain a sustainable and resilient business.

Our customers come from all walks of life, each with different needs, backgrounds, and circumstances. Over time, we've become better at using demographic insights to understand those needs, especially when it comes to identifying customers who are most at risk of experiencing harm or disadvantage. This strategy has been shaped with them in mind, ensuring that the support we provide is focused, responsive, and inclusive.

Since we first launched this strategy, two major events have reinforced just how critical this work is. The Covid-19 pandemic reshaped everyday life and highlighted how differently people were affected. It taught us the importance of listening more deeply and responding more personally. Then, the cost-of-living crisis - further intensified by global events - reminded us of the vulnerable circumstances our customers can find themselves in, and strengthened our resolve to eliminate water poverty in the communities we serve.

Our customers have told us what matters most to them: to feel respected, understood, and supported. Listening to and learning from their experiences has played a central role in developing this strategy, and it will continue to guide our approach going forward.

This strategy sets out how we will respond - through practical actions, shared accountability, and a collective determination - to make a meaningful difference. We are embedding inclusivity into every decision and service - ensuring it's not just a principle, but a practice.

Working together with our customers, constantly seeking their feedback, collaborating with our partners and stakeholders to deliver best practice, I am confident we can meet this challenge and deliver on our purpose in a way that is truly inclusive for all.



Heidi Mottram CBE
CEO



Heidi Mottram, CEO

ABOUT US

Every day we supply 1,104 megalitres (1.1 billion litres) of water.

In the North East of England, we also provide wastewater services.

Our water and sewerage services in the north east cost an average householder £1.39 per day and in Essex and Suffolk 87p for water only service.

Our customers' needs are diverse and we must to deliver tailored support to help through temporary or long term needs.

We operate and maintain:

- 50** water treatment works
- 384** water pumping stations
- 304** service reservoirs
- 26,537km** of water mains
- 411** sewage treatment works
- 972** Sewage pumping stations
- 30,302km** of sewers



2. THE CHALLENGE

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do, and now more than ever, we need to be able to tailor our services to deliver unrivalled experiences that meet their diverse needs.

Since 2018, when we launched our Inclusivity Strategy, there have been unprecedented changes, with Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis changing how people live and work, and so also changing their needs and expectations.

These changes have affected our customers in many ways, changing their day-to-day lives. For some, that means reduced household income, rising costs, and impacts on health and well-being as well as how they choose to engage, work and thrive in society.

Our challenge is to continue building and widening our awareness and understanding of our customers' constantly changing needs to make sure we deliver the right service at the right time in the right way for them to find it valuable. In the pages that follow, we share our ambition for the coming years, some of the great things we've already done, and some of what we're setting out to do so we make a tangible difference for our customers when they may need us most.



DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHT

North East

Our North East operating area is home to around 2.7 million people, with a median age of 42, and a higher percentage of its population aged 55 to 84. The presence of four universities in the North East contributes to a higher percentage of residents aged 16 to 24. There is a higher economic inactivity rate (26.1%) than England excluding London (21.3%), indicating a larger proportion of working-age adults are not actively seeking work.

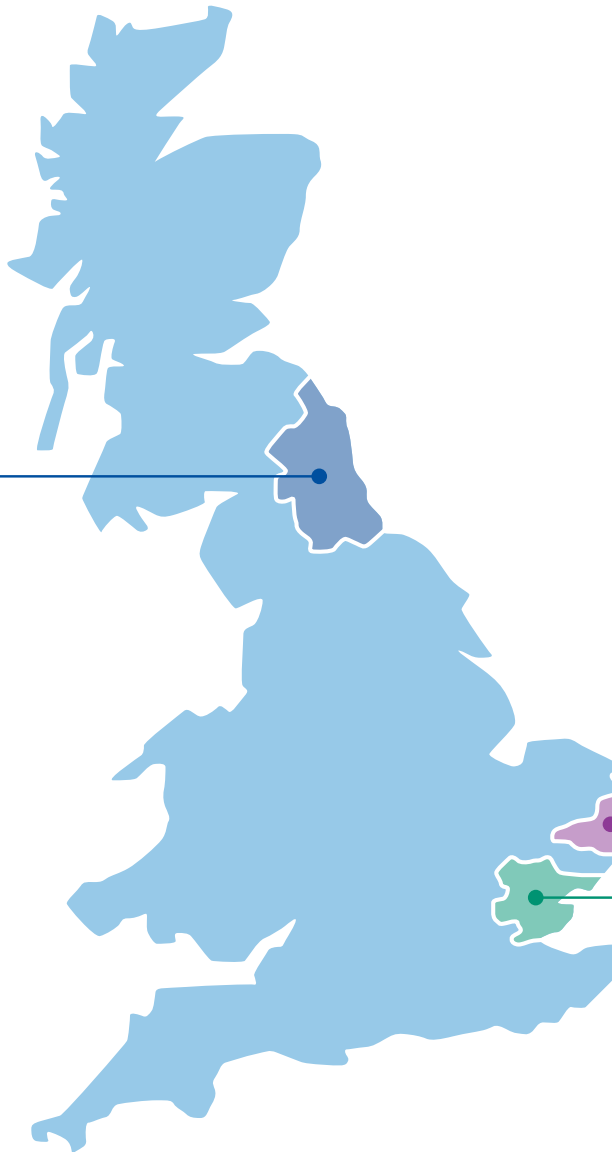
It has the highest proportion of disabled residents in England, with 31% of people reporting a long-term condition that limits day-to-day activities, nearly double the national average of 17.7%.

Digital exclusion remains a concern, with 28% of residents classified as limited internet users, among the highest in the UK, exacerbating barriers to digital services and employment.

Economic indicators reveal a region in need of investment:

- Median household income: £18,388 (vs UK: £34,500)
- Unemployment rate: 3.9% (vs UK average of 4.4%)

These persistent inequalities, combined with higher-than-average rates of chronic illness and lower income levels, reinforce the importance of inclusive planning and targeted support.



Suffolk

Suffolk, with a population of just over 763,000, is a largely rural county with growing towns such as Lowestoft and Ipswich. The region has an older age profile, with 22.7% of residents aged 65 or over (UK average: 18.8%), and a lower proportion of working-age adults at 59.3%.

Despite relatively strong employment rates (77.3%), household incomes lag slightly behind national averages:

- Median household income: £33,900 (vs UK: £34,500)
- Unemployment rate: 3.8% (vs UK average of 4.4%)

Parts of Suffolk, particularly Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, are among the most deprived areas in England, with higher rates of health conditions such as arthritis, high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

The ageing population, rural isolation, and income disparities emphasise the need for accessible, inclusive service design and community engagement across our programmes.

Essex

Greater Essex is home to around 1.5 million people, with a population spread across urban centres, coastal communities, and rural green belts. The area has a working-age population (16 to 64) of 61%, with 21% aged over 65, making planning for aging populations increasingly important.

While employment levels are just above the national average (75%), stark contrasts exist within the region. Pockets of severe deprivation, including 123,000 residents living in the UK's most deprived areas, sit alongside some of the country's most affluent districts. The average property price: £352,447 (higher than the UK average of £285,000).

- Median household income: £24,656 (vs UK: £34,500)
- Unemployment rate: 3.1% (vs UK average of 4.4%)

The region's diversity poses challenges and opportunities: inclusive strategies must account for the widening gap between high and low income communities, especially in access to services, housing, and health.



DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHT (cont'd)

We know that more people are likely to need support in the future and we need to be prepared to provide this support. Many things can affect and influence our customers' daily lives. This page highlights a few of them.

Aging population:

The number of people aged 65 years and over in the UK increased from **9.2 million** in 2011 to over **11 million** in 2021 and the proportion of people aged 65 years and over rose from **16.4%** to **18.6%**.

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS)



Population increase:

The UK population is projected to rise by **6.6 million** to **73.7 million** over the next 15 years to mid-2036 (a **9.9%** increase).

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS)



Mental health:

1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England.

Source: Mind



Dementia:

There are currently estimated to be **982,000** people with dementia in the UK. This number is expected to rise to **1.4 million** by 2040.

Source: Alzheimer's Society



Learning difficulties:

Approximately **2.16%** of adults in the UK are believed to have a learning disability.

Source: Mencap



Autism:

More than **1 in 100 people** are on the autism spectrum and there are around **700,000** autistic adults and children in the UK.

Source: Mencap



Disability:

In England, **18.7%** of females and **16.5%** of males were disabled in 2021.

Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS)



Sight impairment:

In the UK, more than **2 million people** are living with sight loss. Of these, around **340,000** are registered as blind or partially sighted.

Source: NHS



Hearing impairment:

18 million adults in the UK are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus. Over half the population aged 55 or more have hearing loss. **80%** of people over the age of 70 will have hearing loss.

Source: RNID



Cancer:

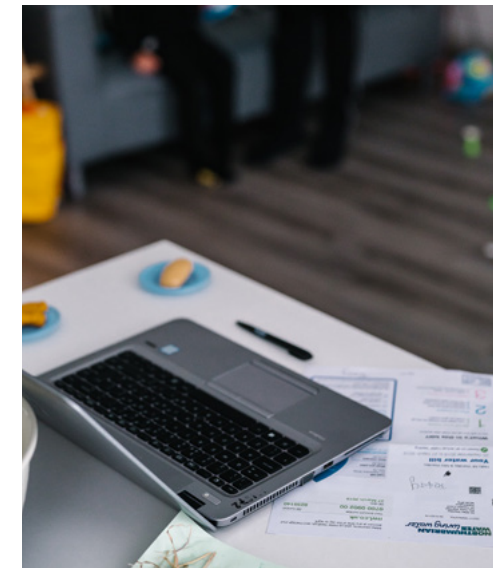
We estimate that there are more than **3 million people** living with cancer in the UK. On average someone is diagnosed with cancer at least every **90 seconds** in the UK.

Source: Macmillan



Changing climate:

We are also aware that as our climate is changing we could see more extreme weather events, which could impact on our services and we are working hard to prepare for this.



OUR RESEARCH AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

We have drawn on our dedicated research alongside learning from our partners to gain a deeper understanding of our customers and the challenges we must overcome.

The impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis has impacted many customers' financial positions. As of March 2025, 12.95% of our customers are in water poverty. We currently define water poverty as households paying more than 3% of their income after housing costs, on their water bill.

Around half of our customers will likely face at least one situation that could lead them to experience circumstances where we could help by tailoring our service. These situations are often short-term and linked to life changes. Having options at these challenging times is so important to customers to feel they are in control – personalising these options and making sure they are tailored to changing needs is critical to our services adding value to their lives.

We use external data to understand our customers and target support both now and as our customer population changes. For example, we have mapped the postcodes we serve against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation to understand which neighbourhoods are most deprived nationally. This covers combined metrics relating to income, educational attainment, health and disability, risk of being a victim of crime, access to housing and the quality of the local environment.

We are expanding the use of external data, working collaboratively to best understand our changing customer circumstances and plan ahead.

Partnering with several energy providers (including Northern Gas Network, Cadent Gas and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks), we are developing a tool with Open Maps to measure and assess community vulnerability both now and in the future.

Customers are not always comfortable sharing their circumstances – Information Commissioner's Office research in 2022 found that just 9% of participants had shared personal information about a vulnerability or personal circumstances with an organisation to receive better support. We must make it easy, be welcoming and provide a safe space.

Accessing our support services through a trusted third-party organisation or charity works well for some customers. For example, we have partnered with StepChange debt charity, the UK's most trusted provider of free debt advice, and the Money Advice Trust to signpost each other's services and support.

There is a barrier for some customers in accessing support because of literacy, numeracy and being uncomfortable with technology. This means that while delivering more digital services is desired by many, retaining telephone, written and face-to-face contact methods is essential for us to be inclusive.

Our tracking research with customers on our Priority Services Register, or those receiving financial support, tells us that customers receiving non-financial support have similar levels of satisfaction to customers in general. In contrast, customers receiving financial support demonstrate much higher satisfaction levels.

Customers who might benefit the most from the extra support we provide are usually the most difficult to reach. We need to work harder to make these customers aware of the available help.

No single approach will work for all customers. Instead we will further enhance tailored communications for each type of circumstance, with room for personalisation within these approaches. Hyper-personalisation of our messages will enable us to proactively communicate and offer timely support when it can bring customers the greatest value.

For customers who need extra help and support, it is really important to use simple and clear language in our communications, select images they can relate to, and steer away from jargon.

We engage our customers with all major programmes that impact them, for example when developing our 2025-30 Business Plan. We published all that research, including the discussions with our regular People Panels, on our website nwg.co.uk/about-us/research-library.

To improve our understanding of our customers in vulnerable circumstances we need to capture customer needs more frequently, by discussing at every touch point.

We are training our teams to see vulnerabilities or highlight where there may be a need and address this during a contact point in a kind and empathetic way.

We are continually horizon-scanning to understand how changing circumstances are affecting our customers. This allows us to develop and streamline our strategy.

We are collaborating with other water companies and learning from published reports to develop our best practice approach.

As of March 2025
12.95%
 of our customers are
 in water poverty.

Awareness and perceptions - results from CCW research

NW 2022	NW 2023	NW 2024		ESW 2022	ESW 2023	ESW 2024
85%	73%	76%	Agree their water and wastewater charges are affordable	78%	77%	70%
76%	62%	59%	Agree that charges are fair	73%	62%	53%
71%	65%	59%	Likely to contact company if worried about paying bill	70%	63%	68%
9%	14%	15%	Aware of WaterSure	14%	19%	18%
44%	44%	59%	Aware of the Priority Services Register	45%	58%	50%
38%	39%	45%	Aware of other schemes offered which provide lower charges to help customers who struggle to afford their bills	35%	44%	54%
68%	64%	63%	Aware that we offer free fitting of water meters (unmeasured customers only)	57%	79%	65%
22%	19%	23%	Aware of option to go back to rateable value charge within 24 months	19%	30%	21%

Figures in green are above industry average. Source: CCW Water Matters, 2025 [www.ccw.org.uk/publication/water-matters-2025/]



3. BUILDING ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS

The approach of our Inclusivity Strategy is to build on the range of support already in place and tailor or personalise it to have real impact.

Being bold in our ambition to end water poverty and create unrivalled experiences for our customers means we want to be clear on how we can support our customers as well as how they can easily access that support.

To meet our customers' needs, our services need to be intuitive and relevant in our customers' ever-changing lives. We need to constantly be aware of evolving challenges and be able to personalise our offerings to individual circumstances.

This strategy centres on developing these tailored options from our established strong range of support measures and implementing new assistance where gaps are identified.

We already support our customers in vulnerable circumstances. Customers can be supported with one or many services, depending on their needs and if long or short-term support is required.

The following list of services is not exhaustive, and we will always look to tailor our services as needed, if customers let us know how we can help.

Living with autism:

Carrying out works can be noisy and disruptive, where pre-planned we will give advanced notice so that customers can be prepared.

Cognitive impairment including dyslexia and dementia:

We can send bills to a trusted friend or family member or call to talk through the bill.

Mobility:

We can make arrangements to deliver bottled water where there is an extended interruption to supply and provide support if access to a property is affected during works.

Living alone:

We can set passwords so customers know it's really us, protecting homes from scammers and bogus callers.

Bills in a different format:

We can send bills and letters in large print, Braille and audio CD. We also offer Text Relay and British Sign Language video translation.

Nominate someone to manage an account:

We can speak to a nominated carer, relative or family member, or send them letters or bills on a customer's behalf.

English not first language?

We can provide a telephone interpreter and our website can be translated using our accessibility and language tool, Recite Me.

Hard of hearing?

We offer British Sign Language users a way to contact us using a live video interpreter, through the InterpretersLive! service, provided by Sign Solutions.





Priority Services Register:

We want to make it as easy as possible to register for our Priority Services Register. This can be done by customers directly with us, through customers' representatives on their behalf, or through securely-shared data from partner organisations.

Customers can sign up with us in the following ways:

- Website
- Using our customer app
- On webchat
- Over the telephone
- Using WhatsApp
- On Facebook Messenger
- Paper application forms (postage paid)
- Through trusted partners

When we add customers to our register, we will ask them to share the individual circumstances that require additional support, and which tailored services they require. We promise to keep this information safe and only use it to make sure we're giving customers the right support.

To help customers get similar support from other organisations, like gas or electricity suppliers, we sometimes share this information with them. So, for example, if there's a power cut, your electricity supplier can offer help.

However customers register with us, we will send them a welcome letter to let them know how we will securely look after their data. This will also inform them about the extra support services we offer, including financial support.

We are improving our welcome letters to give clear details of the service and timescales customers can expect. We will also look to signpost to external support.

We will contact customers on our Priority Services Register at least every two years to update their Priority Services records. Customers who use our customer app will be prompted to update their records when they log on. Where services are not provided as requested, customers will be entitled to a Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) Payment. We will give information about what the payment is for, how much it is, and when and how they will receive it.

We have guaranteed standards of service, if we fall below the high standards we set for ourselves, we'll make a payment under our Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS). In addition to our GSS standards and on a case-by-case basis, we make further payments where a customer has experienced particularly poor service, to recognise the inconvenience caused. Full details of the standards are on page 40.

We are extending our GSS to include new Priority Services standards, ensuring that any failures we're aware of are automatically compensated. Customers will be informed about what the payment is for, how much it is, and when and how it will be issued. We remain fully committed to meeting all GSS standards.

Website address

nwl.co.uk/priorityservices or
eswater.co.uk/priorityservices

Call us on:

Northumbrian Water:
0345 733 5566

Essex & Suffolk Water:
0345 782 0111

Scan QR Code:

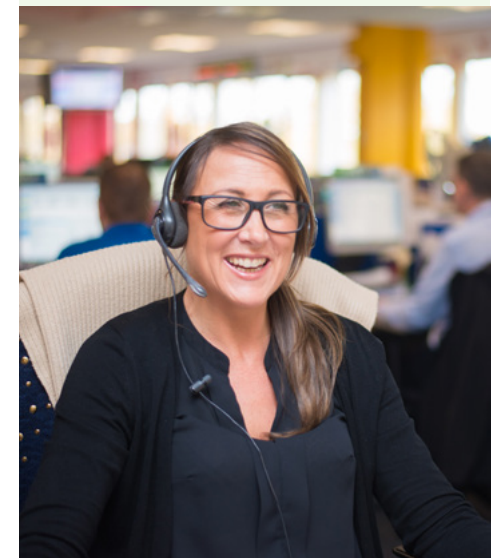


Northumbrian
Water



Essex &
Suffolk Water

Details of how we look after customers' personal information are at
nwl.co.uk/psrprivacy or
eswater.co.uk/psrprivacy.



We offer a range of support to customers who are going through financial hardship. In addition to offering direct support, we work closely with charities and other organisations that can point our customers in the right direction for help. This can include debt advice, checking that they receive all the benefits they are entitled to, or wider personal support with services such as through Age UK.

The support we offer includes:

Flexible payment plan:

We can help customers set up a payment plan with payments they can afford.

Low-income discount:

If households have a low income, or customers receive Pension Credit, we may be able to offer up to **50%** off water bills.

Budget shortfall:

To help you manage your finances better, we may be able to lower payments by up to **50%**. If payments are maintained, we will also write off some or all of their debt.

Bill cap scheme – WaterSure:

We may be able to cap water bills if a customer has a water meter and receives income-related benefits.

Payment breaks:

We can offer payment breaks to help manage unexpected changes such as the loss of a job or unexpected changes in income.

Benefit checker:

We can check to see if customers are receiving all the benefits they're entitled to.

Debt support:

We can refer customers to free debt advice and support organisations to help manage debts.

Water Direct – using benefit payments:

Water Direct helps you pay your bills direct from your benefits to help you manage your finances better.



4. CO-CREATING THIS STRATEGY

In developing this strategy, alongside our Unrivalled Customer Experience Strategy, we have involved customers who face financial, mobility and communication barriers, among others. We heard first-hand about what they consider to be unrivalled customer service.

We have tested the strategy with customers, CCW and stakeholders, to further enhance our plans.



EXTERNAL RESEARCH AND GUIDANCE

CCW is the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales. Every year, CCW conducts research to track household customers' views on the services they receive from water companies. The 2025 report found that while a high proportion of customers would benefit from extra support, their awareness remains low. Clearly, there is more we can do to promote the help we can offer.

CCW also conducted an affordability review ([Independent Review of Water Affordability One-Year on](#)) and made recommendations to water companies and regulators. This report highlighted our successful bid to Ofwat's Innovation Fund for our Support for All project, a cross-sector data sharing project, as an example of good practice.

We have already implemented most of the advice and are working towards implementing the rest.

For example, we have:

- Reduced the bill cap for our WaterSure scheme from the average metered household bill (instead of the overall average bill, which included metered and unmetered).
- Amended our website to simplify information about our financial support schemes.
- Added more information about how customers can access support and what support is available.
- Engaged with CCW to identify barriers to some of its recommendations and where the government and others could make changes.

Customer co-creation

We want customers to be at the heart of every decision we make. As we have developed our [long-term strategy to 2050](#) and our [Business Plan for 2025-30](#), we have engaged with our customers and stakeholders on our strategy, to make sure that our plans will provide the support they need.

Water Forum challenge

Our Water Forum, which scrutinises our approach and challenges our plans, includes community and voluntary sector experts.

We have engaged with Water Forum members to make sure our plans reflect customer priorities, and they have provided valuable [guidance and feedback](#).

Regulator research

We are continually learning from research completed by regulators - one example is one of the [Blue Marble reports](#) on the impact of incidents, which we used to help us review our approach to incidents and led us to move to delivering bottled water when incidents occur that are likely to lead to extended interruption to supply.

Customer Priorities

We constantly talk to our customers to understand not only what they think, but what matters to them and what doesn't. As well as talking about the services we deliver, we also talk to our customers about how they want us to deliver them. We take time to understand what our customers want and expect from their water and wastewater company.

We invest effort and resources into carefully reviewing what they tell us.

Our customers have shared with us their priorities for unrivalled customer experience, which we have used to shape our [Unrivalled Customer Experience Strategy](#). We have taken all their feedback and developed six Customer Priorities - these are our golden threads and they form 'what' we need to do to be successful in our customers' eyes. More information about the six priorities can be found on the following pages.

Accreditations

We have achieved [BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458](#) which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and are continually looking to improve and be innovative with the services we provide. We have also received accreditation for [Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark](#), a national standard, independently recognising an organisation's achievement in customer service and its commitment to upholding those standards. ServiceMark is awarded based on customer satisfaction feedback and an assessment of employee engagement with our customer service strategy.

Benchmarking and sharing of best practice

We are active partners of benchmarking and collaboration groups where we share insights and best practice for supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances. This includes working groups with other water and energy companies such as Infrastructure North, Money Advice Liaison Group, Collaboration Network and Scope Utilities Network. We also work CCW with and other water companies to adopt best practice for incident management both for water interruptions and sewer flooding, particularly for customers in vulnerable circumstances.



OUR SIX CUSTOMER PRIORITIES ARE:



Build it around me

Your services are accessible, easy to use and are available around the clock.

- We embrace diversity and support the individual needs of all our customers, always.
- Our channels are built around our customers' needs enabling them to choose how they engage with us, and when.
- We offer high-quality, accredited customer experience training to all colleagues and partners.
- Our leaders are 100% committed to providing the best experiences, driving our 'right first time, fast time, every time' culture.
- We understand the barriers for customers in vulnerable circumstances face, ensuring tailored options are always available and accessible.



Earn the trust of my community

I trust you to provide us with the services we need in a sustainable and ethical way.

- We look after the environment and our local communities for now and the future.
- Social value is important to us, we invest in local supply chain, work with key stakeholders, and leave positive legacies.
- We invest in our beaches, bathing waters and rivers and ensure thriving spaces in our communities.
- We're building an exceptional workplace culture, delivering a Great Place to Work for all colleagues.
- We regularly engage diverse customer groups to build trust and understanding of community needs.



Make it easy

I enjoy interacting with you because you make it nice, simple and fast for me.

- We embrace diversity and support the individual needs of all our customers, always.
- Our channels are built around our customers' needs enabling them to choose how they engage with us, and when.
- We offer high-quality, accredited customer experience training to all colleagues and partners.
- Our leaders are 100% committed to providing the best experiences, driving our 'right first time, fast time, every time' culture.
- We understand the barriers for customers in vulnerable circumstances face, ensuring tailored options are always available and accessible.



Keep your promises

I can count on you to always do what you say you'll do.

- Training colleagues to connect with our customers is a top priority for us.
- We do what we say we will, when we say we will, every time, as we strive for a consistent right first time culture.
- We benchmark our performance against best in class, not just our own industry, to make sure we keep up with changing expectations and stay on top of promises.
- We measure and learn from customer feedback and sentiment to make sure we drive positive experiences that are effortless and easy to access.
- We horizon scan to find new and innovative ways to be creative and do more of what matters most to customers.



Own my problems

When things go wrong, you get to the bottom of it and put it right straight away. You know how to say sorry.

- We're focused on improving our customers' experiences and reducing complaints, if we don't get things right first time, we'll say sorry and put them right quickly and fairly.
- We invest in our people and their skills so they show emotional intelligence and resilience and can problem solve for our customers.
- Our people thrive on finding ways to innovate, and to make sure we always have our customers at the heart of what we do and how we deliver our services.
- We find ways to inform our customers about channels and services useful to them, gently nudging towards the simplest and best solutions.
- We measure what caused pain points and we use our toolkits and experience to re-design journeys engineering out failure.



Show me that I matter

You show me you know what matters to me and you focus on that.

- Our tone of voice is always friendly and inclusive, and we pride ourselves on being 'a good neighbour' in what we do and how we do it.
- We give our people all the tools and time they need to deliver great customer service every time and we seek feedback so we can continually improve.
- We research and engage with our customers continually, ensuring that their voice and feedback influences our business decisions.
- We personalise as much as we can so we really focus on what our customers tell us is important to them, tailoring our services and engagements.
- We measure the things that matter most, know what success looks like, and keep building from it to be even better.

OUR PILLARS OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EXCELLENCE

Six pillars

To enable our performance against the six Customer Priorities, we've also invested in finding the right proprietary model – tried and tested in many of the best-performing companies worldwide – to show 'how' we make that happen.

We've worked with KPMG Nunwood over a number of years to understand their model – the Six Pillars of Customer Experience Excellence – and to embed it into our training, our thinking and our ways of working. It provides the 'how' to our customers' stated 'what' and provides great practical tools for our people to use in making our experiences unrivalled.

Six pillars of customer experience excellence

Each pillar builds on the other to create world class experiences. They show **how** we must focus our energies and efforts to provide unrivalled experiences every time.



Integrity

Being trustworthy and engendering trust.



Resolution

Turning a poor experience into a great one.



Expectations

Managing, meeting and exceeding customer expectations.



Time and effort

Minimising customer effort and creating frictionless processes.



Personalisation

Using individualised attention to drive an emotional connection.



Empathy

Achieving an understanding of the customer's circumstances to drive deep rapport.

5. INNOVATION AND AMBITION

Our ambition is to make a difference for our customers and to help change their lives. In our view there is no reason why, in the 21st century, customers should be in a position where a water bill is unaffordable.

We also know that more people are likely to need non-financial support in the future and we will continue to find more innovative ways to improve our inclusive service offering.

Support for All: Leading on the build of a cross-sector PSR hub

Working with a consortium of partners, we aim to streamline assistance to vulnerable customers by creating a secure national platform for organisations to accurately share the needs of customers.

At our 2021 Innovation Festival, a shared PSR data solution was introduced. Since then, collaborative design workshop with over 100 stakeholders have worked together to improve the PSR journey for customers.

Following the success of the regional pilot of Support for All in 2023 which cumulated 11.5m properties from six energy and water providers and identified over 350,000 customers in need of PSR support, work started in 2024 to build a national platform.

The primary objective is to create a hub that securely hosts data on customers in vulnerable circumstances. By submitting their details once, customers no longer need to register, improving the user experience.

The hub will enhance data companies currently hold to ensure accurate data sharing among utility companies. This will eliminate the risk of missed or inadequate support due to incorrect information, meaning we can offer timely and tailored support to our vulnerable customers when they need it the most.

Funded by the Ofwat Innovation Fund, Support for All will expand its geographical reach and include additional organisations such as energy suppliers that, while not holding PSR data, possess valuable information. Sharing this data will enable other organisations to enhance the support they provide to customers. Customers will also have the ability to share their needs directly into a central source, as the platform will also provide an accessible customer portal.

The platform will go live in 2025, with the technical build, security controls and requirements agreed. Further functionality and enhancements will be delivered throughout 2025 with the project moving to a fully functioning shared national platform in 2026.

Northumbrian Water Innovation Festival

Each year at our Innovation Festival, we look at a range of challenges currently facing our business, as well as looking at broader environmental issues impacting our wider industry and communities, and then open our doors and bring together a unique group of people who tackle them, head on.

We bring together people from our own business, from other water companies across the UK, Europe and beyond, from tech industries, government, healthcare, customers, third sector organisations, and manufacturers. Our innovation citizens are proudly unique, and bring all sorts of different skills but all have one thing in common... they want to change the world we live in for the better so we leave behind a brighter, more sustainable future for generations to come.

We have tackled a range of challenges that support our customers including:

- **How might we use smart data to improve the lives of customers to enable them to live safely and independently, for longer?**
- **How do we put customers at the heart of decision making by co-creating the future of customer engagement and customer driven change?**
- **What can we do differently to get dis-engaged customers to start paying their bills?**

We are developing these ideas from the festivals to deliver benefits for our customers.



INNOVATION AND AMBITION

Our goal is to eradicate water poverty in our operating areas by 2030. Water and sewerage services should be affordable for all our customers, whatever their circumstances. We want to exceed all industry and regulatory expectations, so that given the choice customers would choose us every time.

The essential nature of our services means that keeping bills affordable is extremely important. If water bills are not affordable or perceived as affordable, this can damage customer and stakeholder trust in our communities. While this means making sure overall bills represent good value for money, we also must pay particular attention to those customers who find it most difficult to pay. Water and sewerage services should be affordable for all our customers – and everyone should have equal access to an unrivalled customer experience.

In 2018 we published our Inclusivity Strategy, which set out how we would achieve these goals. Since then, we have developed our zero water poverty action plan, a sophisticated, ongoing and wide-ranging plan of initiatives between now and 2030 to move around **400,000** customers out of water poverty.

Through increasing awareness, implementing data-sharing arrangements, and building strategic partnerships with national and local stakeholders, we have successfully grown the benefit we provided to our customers. We now support nearly **160,000** customers with a reduced or capped bill.

Since 2019/20 we have increased the number of customers supported by **120,000** in line with our ultimate target to eliminate water poverty by helping **400,000** by 2030. We now have nearly 13% of households registered for our Priority Services Register, an uplift from 1% in 2020/21 who will receive a tailored experience.

The water sector, guided by Ofwat (the economic regulator for the water industry in England), has actively developed its long-term plans for the 2025–2030 period as part of the five-yearly ‘price review’ process. Our approach to supporting customers with financial and non-financial vulnerability will, now more than ever, play a key part in our strategy. Within the strategy, we are committed to delivering a plan that demonstrates our ambition at scale for all customers.



6. OUR AREAS OF FOCUS FOR INCLUSIVITY

This section provides more information about the steps we will take to deliver our Inclusivity Strategy. Each of the ten areas listed builds on our customers' priorities and will form the basis of our action plans.



1. WATER POVERTY

Why it's important

Improving our customers' ability to afford our services is one of the most important ways we can help them. Despite serving areas with some of the highest levels of deprivation and lower-than-average household incomes, we were the first company to set an ambitious goal to eliminate water poverty in our regions by 2030.

This goal formed a significant commitment to our Inclusivity Strategy and has influenced wider national debates about the scope and opportunity for a national social tariff.

What we've done

When we first set our water poverty target, we had an estimated 22% of our customer base in water poverty, equating to **380,000** households. We set out to reduce this number to **140,000** households by 2025.

We planned to use a range of initiatives such as bill reduction, maximising household incomes, water efficiency, metering, and social tariffs to help reduce costs for those least able to afford them.

We are pleased with our progress so far, however some of our initial gains relating to our 2020-25 Business Plan bill reduction have subsequently been eroded away with higher than expected inflation rates.

We anticipated smart metering would help move customers out of water poverty through using less water. However, following supply-chain issues and further challenges resulting from the global micro-chip shortage, the programme has made less progress than expected. Therefore, we have seen less benefit than we anticipated.

The water industry's approach to affordability issues has evolved over many years. In 2021, an independent review of water affordability conducted by CCW identified that many households, despite existing support measures, continued to be charged more than 5% of their income after housing costs on water and sewerage charges.

Our plan for 2025-30

We plan to remove approximately half of these households, some 300,000, from water poverty through a social tariff scheme at 5%. In addition, we forecast that our company-funded scheme will benefit **25,000** households by the end of 2030.

Aligning our plans and support packages for addressing water poverty at 5% in line with the newly established industry measure of water poverty will help to create a greater consistency of support between companies making it easier for customers to understand when they can get help. We understand that this creates a gap for customers we are currently supporting at the 3% water poverty level. Our analysis indicates that the typical customer in this gap will have low income and we are introducing a shareholder backed hardship fund which we will use to continue to support those we are already supporting where they do not meet the 5% water poverty definition.

Maintaining our commitment to eradicate water poverty at 3% will leave us with a gap in the region of 117,000 households. We will work to minimise any negative impact through further innovations, driving efficiency, providing holistic support, and exploring alternative funding sources. Closing this gap will require additional funding of £7m per year.

Our plan will see us supporting an additional **265,000** households since the start of 2020. All customers in water poverty in our areas will be supported. From 2025, we will introduce our new Financial Hardship fund – with a **£20m** contribution from our shareholders over the next five years. This is new support from our shareholders in addition to current commitments. Doing more for people who are struggling, in turn, supports the overall affordability of our plan for 2025-30.

During 2024/25, the number of customers benefitting from affordability tariffs increased by 20%.

Our company-funded tariff also increased in 2024/25, which means we now have 15,203 customers benefitting from bill reductions of up to 50%.



2. INNOVATIVE TARIFFS

Why it's important

Innovative water tariffs are important because they help us use water wisely, make sure we have enough water for the future, and manage water in a way that is good for the environment and society, even as our needs change over time. These tariffs encourage people and businesses to use water efficiently, plan for the future, and protect our water resources for generations to come.

What we've done

In 2021, in partnership with the NEA, we ran a design sprint involving 26 participants from 16 organisations to explore if water tariffs could be redesigned to address multiple challenges facing the water industry and its customers.

Recognising the ongoing work towards a single social tariff, this was not about providing additional support to those eligible for pre-existing affordability support but about identifying other needs and developing potential tariffs to meet those needs.

In addition, it is our intention to introduce a new water-saving smart meter tariff in 2025 to reward customers for positive environmental and water use behaviours to achieve a shift in attitudes and sustainable behaviour change.

Cross-subsidies must be recognised and supported by customers, and in 2020 we conducted robust customer research to test support for an increase in our cross-subsidy for social tariffs and to understand what level of subsidy they might be willing to bear.

Our plan for 2025-30

Tariff innovation is crucial for our longer-term approach to affordability. Ofwat has already opened discussions about tariff innovation in the context of supporting affordability. Our response detailed how we would be looking to support large households or people with limited control over water use due to household composition (for example, families with children or those with medical conditions).

We are looking for opportunities to use innovative tariffs to phase any negative impact of compulsory metering, which we will introduce in Essex and Suffolk only from 2025. This might include, for example, capping charges for high water users who cannot effectively manage their usage, such as larger households or lower-income households with a medical need where benefits are not paid. These customers are not eligible for our WaterSure tariff that caps bills but would be vulnerable to a large bill increase. Our smart metering programme gives us an opportunity to offer digital customers more flexibility in payments, billing and tariffs and we are using our insights to tailor new tariff offerings.

We are keen to trial new tariffs and have engaged with the recent Ofwat consultation and workshops. For example, we will trial a water-saving tariff alongside our smart metering programme to reward customers who reduce their consumption.

We have also looked at innovative tariffs that could help customers save money, such as reducing standing charges to allow customers to reduce their bills where they were using less water.

We will complete annual engagement sessions with customers and partners to understand the opportunities to deliver tariffs that support our customers, with focus on horizon scanning and how we deliver tariffs that support our digitally excluded customers.

In 2021, in partnership with the NEA, we ran a design sprint involving 26 participants from 16 organisations.

We now have 132,680 customers benefitting from bill reductions of up to 50%.

We've seen a steady increase in our WaterSure numbers, which have increased to 17,298.



Case Study

Helping customers check eligibility for government benefits

Company Funded Tariffs and Pensioner Support

In February 2023, we launched an option for our customers to apply online for all our affordability tariffs using our Financial Assessment tool. This tool is provided by Policy In Practice, who are experts in benefit entitlement. We had been hosting this service for customers to check eligibility for government benefits already.

Our previous application approach involved customers having to send us proof of their household income which included bank and benefit statements, so this caused a barrier for customers to apply and high customer effort.

Working with Policy In Practice, we enhanced the service and built-in all the eligibility for our tariffs and any other sewerage provider we collect for. This provides them a one stop shop option to check if they are entitled to a discount and any additional government benefits at one time. We are seeing **85%** of customers who apply are eligible for a discount of up to **50%**.

In the last 12 months, **9,895** customers have completed the tool with **£13,909,233** benefits identified.

The tool:

- Gives instant answer on eligibility for a discount.
- Compares an unmetered bill with how much a metered bill would cost, based on number of occupiers.
- Provides a link to apply for other government benefits they are eligible for.
- Prompts customers to complete an income and expenditure form to see if they would be eligible for a reduced bill, as they don't have enough money to cover essential if not eligible for low-income discount.

It only takes around ten minutes to complete the form and customers have an instant answer. For any customers who are unable to complete themselves, we can complete this over the phone to make sure everyone has access to the enhanced information.

In the last 12 months, **9,895** customers have completed the tool, with **£13,909,233** benefits identified. The assessment tool found an average of **£487 per month** that those missing out on benefits were eligible for but not claiming.



3. SUPPORT WHEN THERE IS AN INTERRUPTION TO WATER SUPPLY

Why it's important

We know that an interruption to a customer's water supply can impact our customers, especially when they need the supply due to medical conditions or have limited mobility. Our first aim is to prevent any interruptions to supply, sometimes these are unavoidable, so we will look at how we can support during this time and provide alternative supply.

When there is an interruption to supply, whether this is planned or unplanned, we will reach out to our customers proactively to let them know. Where we have mobile phone numbers or email addresses for customers, we will contact them directly. We will use our social media platforms and update our website to spread the messages wider, and for major incidents we will work with local authorities and other emergency services to share messaging. We will use this opportunity to promote registration onto our Priority Services Register.

For extended interruptions to supply, we will set up water stations in the local community so that supplies can be collected free of charge. These stations will be advertised locally using social media and in partnership with councils.

We will look at our messaging during incidents to capture what extra support is needed, this is especially important for customers who may not be on PSR but due to circumstances need help at that time.

When creating communications, we commit to be open, timely, and empathetic. We will adjust our communication methods to accommodate customers with additional support needs during incidents, including providing formats such as large print, Braille, and others. Providing customers real time updates where possible.

We will complete research to understand how financially vulnerable customers' needs may change during an interruption. So going beyond the needs of PSR customers.

For customers who have let us know they cannot collect water or have a medical dependency, and where there is an extended interruption to supply we will deliver bottled water to customers' homes.

To allow us to prioritise customers who are most impacted by interruptions to supply, we are introducing priority ratings for delivery of bottled water when there is an extended interruption.

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
Dialysis - feeding pump and automated feed	Unable to answer the door	Partially sighted	Pensionable age
Poor sense of smell/taste	Cognitive impairment - inc Dementia	Medically dependent - showering/bathing	Unable to communicate in English
Water dependent	Nebuliser and apnoea monitor	Careline/telecare	Medicine refrigeration
	Heart/lung ventilator	Hearing impairment	Families with children under 5 years old
	Oxygen concentrator		Additional presence preferred
	Stair lift/hoist/electric bed		Speech impairment
	Physical impairment		Temporary - life change
	Development condition		Temporary - young adult
	Mental health		
	Temporary - post hospital		
	Chronic serious illness		
	Oxygen use		
	Restricted hand movement		
	Blind		

What we've done

We have set up business continuity associates to enhance management of interruption incidents.

We have enrolled over **250 employee volunteers** to support our communities with delivery of bottled water and sharing messages where there is an interruption. These can support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

We complete a review after major incidents to understand how our customers have been impacted and how service can be improved.

We have deployed MoWBis (small, portable water tanks that can be quickly connected to homes to keep the water running when there's a problem with the main supply, like during a burst pipe or maintenance work).

Those on our Priority Services Register are given these first and they hold enough clean water for a household to use for basic needs (like drinking, cooking, and flushing toilets) for about six hours.

ToWBi is a larger version of the MoWBi. It's designed to supply water to more people at once, like an entire street, a school, a care home, or a group of businesses, during the same kinds of water supply issues.

Both are easy to set up, don't need electricity, and help avoid having to hand out bottled water when there's a disruption

Our plan for 2025-30

- We will share lessons learned from incidents with stakeholders so that we can improve how we support customers, and prevent foreseeable harm.
- We will make it easy for our customers to be compensated if we fail our promises for Priority Services. We will be upfront about compensation from the start and make prompt payment, providing a clear, timely, simple process.
- To support those most impacted by supply interruptions, we're introducing a four-stage priority system for bottled water delivery, based on customers' ability to collect water and their level of dependence. The priorities are shown on the left.

Priority one includes those on dialysis, with reduced taste or smell, or who are highly water-dependent. We aim to deliver to these customers within three hours of an interruption - or in advance, where possible.

4. CUSTOMER AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Why it's important

We want customers to be at the heart of everything we do, and every decision we make. High quality customer engagement is critical to empower customers and make sure that their voice is heard by everyone involved in developing our long-term strategy and Business Plan for 2025-30. Engaging informed stakeholders, who have expertise on the detail of policy issues or into customer groups, helps us better understand the impact of our actions and decisions.

What we've done

We ask customers as well as employees and stakeholders to take part in designing and renewing our services and policies.

We have developed a deep understanding of our customers and use innovative segmentation to reach specific groups. We include customers who need extra support in all the customer engagement and participation that we carry out so we can understand different perspectives and needs.

At the 2022 Innovation Festival working with wide-ranging customers, stakeholders, and colleagues, highlighted the need for a universally inclusive design for all our customer journeys. We identified that customers' situations are fluid and therefore their experiences need to accommodate changes frequently.

Our work includes developing relationships with specialist partners to help better understand physical challenges, mental well-being, financial hardship and life in rural communities.

Current activity

- Regular customer and stakeholder testing of views on affordability and inclusivity.
- Dedicated task group work from the Water Forum (our independent challenge group) on affordability and inclusivity.
- Universal design of all new business customer journeys and processes.
- Engagement with external awareness campaigns, such as Talk Money Week and Dementia Action Week.
- We measure the satisfaction of customers in vulnerable circumstances. With telephone interviews we ask how satisfied they are with the additional support provided and have a target of 8.8 out of 10.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will continue to invest in our communities through initiatives like Just an Hour, encouraging employees to give back to causes they care about.

We will organise annual events that bring together local and regional organisations, building stronger relationships with them and increasing awareness of the support we can offer.

Customers are at the heart of our planning and decision-making processes. We value their input and design services based on their needs and preferences.

By aligning customer engagement with our work, we have made sure our Business Plan reflects the right outcomes at the right time, meeting customer expectations.

For example, together with our innovation network, we're developing low-carbon, water-efficient homes, testing these out with real customers with the goal of lowering energy and water costs.

We will also continue to engage with customers on a large scale, offering valuable services like lead pipe replacement, water efficiency advice, and financial support as needed.

We're committed to making a positive impact on our communities, engaging customers in our journey, and pioneering sustainable solutions for a brighter future.

We have focused energy and efforts into engaging with customers in community groups, schools and organisations to build relationships and spread awareness of our extra support, directly to those who may need it, benefit from it, or be able to share it wider within their own personal social networks. Our new community vehicles are out and about ahead of our smart metering programme, attending events and dropping in to community settings to engage with our customers.

At least **25%** of our research participants are those who are in circumstances where they may be considered or consider themselves vulnerable.

We measure **satisfaction** of customers in vulnerable circumstances with the support provided both financial and non financial.

Our customers are at the **heart** of everything we do.

Customers should be able to tell us about things that matter to them, in the way they want to talk to us.

Case Study

Community engagement

From April 2024 to March 2025, we arranged **225** events across **216** workable days, making use of Carlton (our community engagement vehicle in Suffolk), which allowed us to engage with **4,077** customers. We helped streamline services by completing 549 processes on-site, such as setting up Direct Debits, signing customers up for the Priority Services Register (PSR), processing meter applications, and conducting self-leak tests. This meant customers didn't have to wait for appointments or call in for assistance.

Our commitment to customer satisfaction is reflected in our **10/10** satisfaction scores. We've also focused on learning from customers with lived experiences to improve our service.

One example involved a group with varying levels of sight loss, where we learned that sending leaflets in different formats wasn't practical. Instead, they suggested calling ahead for PSR customers to inform them before any jobs, and following up to make sure everything went smoothly. This approach has helped us refine our communication.

Another situation involved a customer who had difficulty determining if their water was discoloured during a supply interruption. After discussing with the group, we worked with our operations team to send notifications earlier and advise customers with sight loss to ask someone to check their supply. We also plan to proactively call, where possible, affected Priority Service customers during disruptions to provide updates and support.

We arranged **225** events across **216** days, which allowed us to interact with **4,077** customers.



5. EXPAND OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND NURTURE REGIONAL AND LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Why it's important

Partnerships are key to successful outcomes for those most in need. In 2025-30, we will continue to build a strong network that is aligned to our customers' needs and reaches the households and individuals who will benefit most from our support and services. We will work with trusted advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice, and voluntary organisations that support our customers, promote our services and refer customers to trusted organisations for additional support.

What we've done

We are an active member of Norfolk Governance Network, pan-Northern Collaboration, and Utilities Together, which bring together expertise across industries to share best practice and do combined initiatives to have the optimum customer reach.

We have increased engagement and applications for Priority Services by working in partnership with Age UK North Tyneside.

Following an idea from our Innovation Festival, we completed a six-week trial working with Believe Housing in the North East. Believe Housing is a social housing provider in County Durham with more than 18,000 homes. During the trial, we co-located employees in Believe Housing's offices, also working with the local authority and Money and Pension Service to offer a one-stop support service covering water, housing, council tax and money/debt advice. This initiative delivered fantastic customer outcomes in providing rounded support to those in need.

Internally, we have introduced training on inclusivity, in partnership with the Money Advice Trust, to help identify customers in situations where we can offer further support.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will further develop our support for customers by expanding our strategic, regional and community partnerships. We already partner with StepChange debt charity, which offers free, independent debt advice to help customers manage their budgets. In addition, StepChange refers customers to us, advising them to apply for our affordability schemes. Our customers' feedback on this service has been very positive, with many customers being provided with a route out of debt.

We will also:

- Become Scope Utilities partners. This will help provide specialist support and help to help reduce costs and improve the services we offer disabled people.
- Introduce partnership ambassadors to expand regional partnerships with organisations who support customers when they need a little extra help.
- Build strong community partnerships in Essex and Suffolk linked to our smart metering roll-out. As part of this, we will look to partner with a discount provider to offer a range of shopping discounts which help customers' money go further.

- Build on a trial that saw our people working in the same office as Believe Housing, to offer a more holistic customer support experience, to develop a 'one-stop shop' approach to support housing providers and other partners.
- Expand our partnerships, for example, we have already worked with Gateshead Council and Citizens Advice Gateshead to support their Warm Spaces initiative over the winter months. In addition, we're committed to making donations to help offset the additional costs for water use incurred by the smaller organisations offering these services.
- Work with TransUnion, who are a credit reference agency, to give our customers access to their credit information which will drive awareness, share insight, and provide education and alerts to support them in taking steps to improve their credit score and overall financial well-being.
- We will lead a Task and Finish Group responsible for delivering Waterwise's strategic objective to include water efficiency measures in building retrofit programmes, including achieving net zero. As set out in Waterwise's Water Efficiency Strategy 2030, reducing household water consumption plays an integral role in reducing carbon emissions and achieving net zero. Heating water (excluding space heating) accounts for 17% of household energy use. This means that households reducing hot water use can also save money on their water bills.

We also know that around 4-5% of UK greenhouse gas emissions come from how we use water in our homes. It's therefore crucial that water efficiency measures are included in future national energy efficiency retrofit programmes.

- Continually review customer feedback, and the levels of engagement and support provided in each area. Expand the use of external data working in collaboration with Open Maps to develop a tool for measuring and assessing community vulnerability. This will be used to build long term plans on increased support.
- We consult with our customers through various channels of engagement to understand which organisations would be valuable to partner with, we build this feedback into our plans and strategies.

Partnerships are key to successful outcomes for those most in need.

6. BUILDING AWARENESS OF OUR HELP

Why it's important

There is a significant challenge across the sector to raise awareness and take-up of financial and non-financial support. Identifying customers who are most likely to need help and, more importantly, engaging with them can be challenging.

The socio-economic challenges in our operating area mean the need for Priority Services to support customers is more significant than in many other regions in England and Wales.

This is why we place particular emphasis on delivering effective customer assistance schemes. In addition, we must continue to work to identify and engage with customers in vulnerable circumstances and improve the breadth and uptake of support we offer. Responding to these local and national challenges both now and in the future will be vital in building and maintaining trust with our customers.

Some customers may not seek help because they are wary of sharing their personal information or through pride or fear. These customers may prefer to make sacrifices, such as going without heating or food, rather than failing to pay their water bill.

Customers may also not realise the impact a change of circumstances, such as illness, bereavement or job loss, can have.

As a result, they may refuse support if it is not promoted correctly, and no single approach to services or communication will be successful with all customers.

Where we cannot help further, customers tell us they would like us to signpost them to other sources of local help, such as charities and organisations that provide grants. We will seek to partner with these organisations to support as many as possible.



“4/10 households in the poorest fifth of the population do not receive the benefits they are entitled to, leaving them without additional support.”

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)

What we've done

To raise awareness of our different Priority Services and to encourage sign ups to our register (PSR), we've proactively contacted customers using more than two million targeted email communications and social media campaigns. Such targeted and timely emails achieve high open rates and generate high traffic to the relevant pages of our websites. In addition, we have enhanced our social media messaging, focusing on situational rather than service-based narratives to target and offer support to different customer groups.

Using our PSR digital twin dashboard, which details internal and external information about demographics, sign-ups to tariffs and PSR information to help us understand our customers better, we have been able to prioritise which segments to target who may need additional non-financial support. For example, segmenting pensioners, homes with young children, people with health problems and households with an income below £26,000. We've created a messaging matrix from this information by identifying their needs rather than using generic messaging.

We've created a suite of digital adverts using these messages promoted online on websites and social media and using keywords targeted on Google. We also continue our outdoor advertising which will support these messages for customers who are not online.

We've been using recent incidents and topical situations as a proactive opportunity to encourage customers to update their contact details with us, sign up for PSR, and promote online accounts (through email marketing and our social media channels). For example, more than 2,700 people signed up for PSR in one week following our communications about storms Eunice and Dudley.

Building on existing data-sharing arrangements with UK Power Networks, we are working with Cadent Gas, UK Power Networks, Northern Powergrid, Northern Gas Networks, as well as with other water companies, to identify the best way to share information about those who need extra support.

After successfully bidding for funding to Ofwat's Innovation Fund, the Support for All project seeks to design and build a hub to host this data, sharing Priority Service Registers between companies and saving customers from having to update their details more than once. Once this is working with existing partners, we would like to develop this into a national platform to benefit society.

Since the pandemic our external communications has been focused on supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances. We have often linked with external campaigns such as Debt Awareness Week, World Kidney Awareness Day, the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) Talk Money Week, or our money-saving tariffs to Black Friday deals to reach a different audience who may not think these schemes are relevant for them.

We have used pause advertising to raise awareness of our support, when customers are watching on demand channels and pause the programmes such as Emmerdale or Coronation Street, they would be shown our QR codes to click through for more information.

We have focused energy and efforts into engaging with customers in community groups, schools and organisations to build relationships and spread awareness of our extra support, directly to those who may need it, benefit from it, or be able to share it wider within their own personal social networks.

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

LIVING WITH A MEDICAL CONDITION?

Do you need extra support due to age, disability, mobility issues, mental health or communication needs?

We're here to help when you need us.



Register now
nwl.co.uk/priorityservices

#WaterWithoutTheWorry

Our plan for 2025-30

We will enhance our targeted communications campaigns for each circumstance, by adding personalisation within these approaches. Correctly understanding customers' needs and diverse circumstances is critical to success. For customers needing extra help and support, we use straightforward language in our communications and avoid jargon.

Expanding awareness campaigns, including radio, TV adverts, TikTok and Snapchat.

We are using credit reference agency information to identify low income household areas to target our promotion.

Our smart metering programme is an opportunity to raise awareness of our support, with direct engagement both through installation and community engagement completed at the time. We will use this engagement and additional data we have access to, to understand if there may be a barrier or reluctance to use water as they are worried about the costs.

We have made significant strides to enhance our local and strategic partnerships, and key initiatives for 2025-30 that will further build upon this include:

- Rebranding our inclusivity messaging following customer research. This will see our communications evolve from personas we used in developing our Water Without the Worry campaign to more relevant and accessible profiles.

- We're expanding our inclusivity training for all employees and partners working on our behalf. To make every customer contact count, we need everyone they are in contact with to be able to understand the wide range of support we have available. The training provides tips and tools to identify vulnerable circumstances and how we can tailor support to fit.
- We have developed an integrated approach where meter installers are specifically trained to give a rounded customer experience at an individual level based on their specific needs. Smart meter installers can talk to people about personal circumstances, at the time of installing the meter. This successful approach will now be rolled out across all meter services.
- 'Smart Cookies' is a development opportunity for employees across the company in all departments to learn about smart metering and become ambassadors. They will then be able to advise customers based on real time data and personalised information, improving customer service.
- We will integrate our general marketing communication campaigns to better highlight the financial and non-financial services we offer, personalised and tailored to customers unique circumstances.

- We will work with partners and stakeholders to share key messages across all available channels to make sure we have maximum exposure and reach. This includes working with local and national charities, emergency services, cultural and community groups.
- We will work to support customer adoption and education of digital tools and we will offer alternative routes of communication where social media and digital tools are unavailable. This may include having a greater presence in local communities where there is higher levels of digital deprivation.
- We will review our use of alternative literature and how we can promote payment options in variety of formats and languages for those with specific communication needs.
- We will continue to use demographic data and insights to identify those who are most in need of registering for additional support, both Priority Services and financial assistance. Our partnership efforts will focus on communities where customers require the most support.

We have made **significant** strides to enhance our local and strategic partnerships.



Case Study

Age UK North Tyneside

Working in partnership builds trust with our customers; joint communications sent with Age UK North Tyneside has seen increased engagement and applications for Priority Services (PSR).

By using our data to target elderly customers in North Tyneside, we have written to customers to promote the vast array of support which Age UK provide and also detail the tariffs and support we can offer.

This approach has brought **4,500** new customers to our PSR and can add approximately **60,000** additional properties to the PSR if extended.

This has led to additional partnership work with Age UK North Tyneside, including sharing data to help them understand the journey to net zero for elderly customers.



“ We appreciate that working with trusted partners helps us to reach more customers and share messages about the services we can provide to them. We were delighted to be approached by Northumbrian Water to help build confidence in the benefits of Priority Services Register and signpost to our own range of services. We very much look forward to working together in the future to bring benefit to our mutual customers.

Sonya Roe, Business Development & Marketing Manager, Age UK North Tyneside



Case Study

Kidney Care UK

We identified that we were under-represented for customers who were having kidney treatment, compared to regional figures from Kidney Care UK. We created a targetted communications campaign, including direct contact to renal units, providing posters and leaflets. We saw an increase of 59% in registrations.

We are now expanding this approach to other under-represented areas.

ESSEX & SUFFOLK WATER *living water*

LIVING WITH A KIDNEY CONDITION?

Let us know as we have a range of **FREE Priority Services** that could give you peace of mind and make things a bit easier.

Scan the QR code with the camera function on your smartphone to register for free or visit eswater.co.uk/prioritieservices | 0345 782 0111



7. TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES



Why it's important

It is vital that our employees have awareness of the broad range of needs of our diverse customers and have tools to support where appropriate or further signpost them to additional support services. Key to this is delivering our Inclusivity Awareness training across our organisation.

What we've done

Our online Inclusivity Awareness training has already been completed by over **300 of our frontline employees** to give them the tools to identify customers in situations where we can offer further support.

This training programme is reinforced with coaching and best practice assessments. We run a detailed internal awareness campaign for all employees about the different types of circumstances customers may be in where we should offer extra help and support. It includes specialist training such as mental health awareness, loan shark training and suicide awareness. On an ongoing basis we always encourage employees to contribute their ideas to improve services for customers and will highlight examples of good practice.

We are extending our training programme to our delivery partners who deliver capital programmes and large-scale works on our behalf. Our aim is for every contact our customers have with us or our partners to have the same experience around identifying vulnerable circumstances and signposting for additional support.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

- Create an enhanced inclusivity training package for employees co-designed with Northern Gas Networks and the National Energy Action group. The training will be tailored to the frequency and nature of employees' engagement with customers.
- Refine our affordability training to provide tailored communications and solutions.
- Work with the Alzheimer's Society to become a Dementia Friends company.
- Support colleagues in our field teams with full information of customers' needs and provide them with the tools to enable easy sign up to our support schemes.
- Host regular diversity and inclusion sessions that are open to all employees.
- Provide in-depth training for recruiting managers around diversity and inclusion.
- Inform our teams to develop an enhanced understanding of the different characteristics and needs and a toolkit of resources they can share with customers, friends and family.
- Use diversity and inclusion networks to increase external engagement.

Our online Inclusivity Awareness training has already been completed by **over 300 of our frontline employees**.

We'll work with the Alzheimer's Society to become a **Dementia Friends** company.



We host **regular diversity and inclusion sessions** that are open to all employees.

8. SHARING CUSTOMER DATA

Why it's important

Those needing support are often the very hardest to reach, and while increasing awareness of the support we offer is important, this alone will not be enough to make sure all eligible customers access these services. We are therefore also working with partners to explore all appropriate opportunities for data sharing.

What we've done

- Become an early adopter of data sharing with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help identify customers needing financial support.
- Worked with Norfolk County Council helping customers in arrears through the Government's Household Support Scheme and we are discussing data sharing and hardship support with a further six councils.
- Become an active member of Norfolk Governance Network, pan-Northern Collaboration and Utilities Together.
- Our customer research asked our customers how they felt about data sharing. We learned that our customers want us to be transparent. Customers want to know what is being shared, who with, and why. We have improved the letters we send to customers when they join our Priority Services register, so they tell customers who we are sharing their data with and what the benefits of sharing it are.
- Set up data sharing agreements with distribution network providers in our area, so that we can register and update customers information for PSR, removing customer effort.

Our plan for 2025-30

Our plan will see a significant expansion of the breadth and depth of data sharing arrangements to make sure we can support as many customers as possible and provide better integration between our offerings for financial and non-financial support.

By 2030 we will have delivered the following improvements:

- Expansion of PSR data sharing for all regions.
- Data-sharing agreements with local authorities and housing providers in our operating areas and incorporated PSR in our scheduled agreements with local authorities.
- Arrangements to share data with trusted partner organisations, with customers' consent, so that customers who need extra support do not have to keep providing information to multiple organisations.
- Support For All - a single online support hub to allow energy and water companies to share details of who is on their PSR. The ambition is for this to eventually lead to data being shared by utility providers to make it easier for customers in need of financial help to be identified and helped at an earlier stage.
- Expanded partnerships with the National Health Service (NHS).
- Expand data sharing of Priority Services records from needs codes only to include the tailored services required by customers to deliver a more robust one stop service.

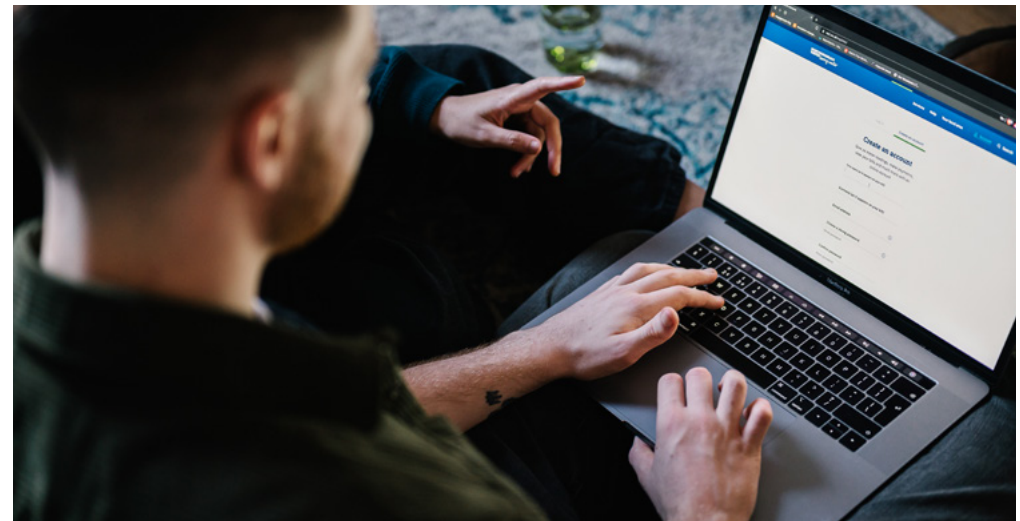
Data sharing with the DWP to move customers out of water poverty

In March 2021, we were an early adopter of data sharing with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help identify customers needing financial support. This Act allowed DWP and other authorities to share information with water companies to help people living in water poverty to reduce their water bills, improve water efficiency, or improve their health or financial well-being.

We securely share customer data with the DWP, which matches it against its records to let us know if a customer receives certain benefits. This approach allows us to provide industry-leading proactive service to our customers, applying discounts to their

water bills and moving them out of water poverty without needing them to take time and effort to apply to us. This has helped to increase the number of customers benefiting from WaterSure by more than **160%** as of March 2025.

As a result, we now have eight times as many pensioner households supported by a discounted bill compared to January 2022. We know pensioner households have heightened concerns about scams and often view support schemes as handouts. This proactive approach has overcome this barrier and provided customers with the discounts they are entitled to.



9. EASILY ACCESSIBLE VIA CHANNELS OF CUSTOMERS' CHOICE

Why it's important

We aspire to be the world's most digital water company, making sure we keep pace with and drive positive change through technology enablement while ensuring that all our customers retain choice so they can contact us where, when, and how they need to.

We recognise that customers who need extra help often wish to use online channels because of personal sensitivities. We will enable this by systematically reviewing all customer journeys across our digital and non-digital estate, creating improved service and journey maps, and digitising touchpoints wherever possible.

Although levels of digital deprivation have been falling, there is a strong link between poverty and digital exclusion. We must continue to offer customers a range of accessible contact methods and support customer adoption of digital tools. For customers who prefer or require non-digital channels, we already use home visits to talk customers through the types of support we can provide, and a small number of customers visit our offices to seek help.

Our research said that being easy to access means various channels available, but phone remains the most wanted route, so we will always give the option for customers to pick up the phone and speak to a person.

We know face-to-face conversations can be a useful way to make sure customers understand and can get access to the services we provide. We often use customer drop-in sessions and specially trained employees go out into our communities to talk to our customers, making it easy for customers to engage with us on their turf.

We have fully accessible community vehicles and pop up shops to make sure we are visible and active in our communities.

We will target communities where our help will make the biggest difference. We are investing in additional customer engagement vehicles for Essex and Suffolk to make sure we play a visible and active role in our local communities.

What we've done

We run sustained integrated communications campaigns to make sure internal messaging, external communications, digital and social media, marketing, and stakeholder engagement messages are consistently acknowledging the wider affordability challenges. For example, during National Customer Service Week (October 2021) we relaunched Water without the Worry where we focused on promoting our support services and encouraging our customer service colleagues (Water without the Worry Warriors) to use a specially designed social media toolkit to promote our services on their local social media groups.

In 2021 our integrated advertising campaign focused on the message 'help with bills', and we communicated a wide range of free support, especially for those unexpectedly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and people already having financial difficulties. We have continued the promotion and targeted approaches since then. We continue to provide our customers with guidance on how we can help make sure their water bills are more affordable. Using feedback from customers and their representatives, we have made changes to make finding the help they need on our website easier.

In addition we have:

- Used envelopes as well as bills to promote the wide range of support available because some people don't actually open their bills.
- Enhanced our messaging across all communications to make it relevant, for example, are you on Pension Credit or do you earn less than £26,000.
- Updated and aligned our affordability scheme names following CCW customer research.
- Worked with a specialist language partner Mazaru to improve clarity of written communications including bills, promotions and reminder letters being issued to customers.
- Provided Recite Me, an accessibility toolbar, across all our websites to allow for translation and tailoring for individual needs.
- Simplified online registration for PSR.
- Increased the number of face-to-face visits across all areas to provide affordability assessment support.
- Launched WhatsApp as a contact channel.
- Upgraded our communications system so that all contact channels are aligned and offering enhanced routing options.
- Achieved BSI Kitemark for a third year demonstrating our focus on providing excellent service to customers in vulnerable circumstances.
- Received the **Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark**, which is based on customer satisfaction feedback and an assessment of employee engagement with our customer service strategy.
- We've made it easier for our online customers to apply for discounts and find answers quickly, creating a much simpler and more user-friendly experience.
- We've also make sure that our website highlights the most important messages right from the start, such as affordability support and clear explanations of bills, which are especially valuable for customers when they need extra help.
- We have introduced BSL interpreter services on our website.
- We are working towards accreditation by the Shaw Trust for meeting Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 Level AA accessibility standards, demonstrating our commitment to creating inclusive digital experiences for all. We continue to strive for even greater accessibility by actively exploring new features, including the potential integration of sign language translation for our website content.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

- As part of our smart metering implementation, we will support customers in moving to monthly electronic billing. This will help their understanding of the link between how much water they use and their bill and also mean new home movers will receive their first bills more quickly.
- Make our digital experiences more personal to the customer, highlighting information they need or would find useful at each point in the online journey.
- Use proactive notifications such as in-app and web notifications, including push notifications, in our mobile app and text messaging to flag changes in how much water they are using to alert them to possible increases in water use.
- Enhance our digital capabilities to offer our customers more flexibility and control of their payment plans. This will support customers with irregular incomes, such as those on zero-hours contracts, and customers requiring short-term budgeting flexibility.
- Make it easier for customers to get the help they need by creating an online tool that will allow customers to assess their eligibility and suitability for additional services such as affordability schemes, Priority Services, water metering and efficiency.
- We continue to strive for even greater accessibility by actively exploring new features, including the potential integration of sign language translation for our website content.
- Simplify online registration and access to our services and provide better options so all customers can manage their accounts and services online. This will make it easier for our customers and make sure they don't have to repeat information. For example, our technology can put contacts through to the same person the customer was previously in touch with. In addition, the investments we are making in new systems make it far easier for our advisors to see, at a glance, a customer's history and understand their circumstances.
- Build our understanding of customer behaviour on their use of our digital products through customer insight data and customer research to shape what we deliver in the future.
- Make sure all information is given at a relevant time, as well as consistent messaging across all platforms and channels of choice.
- We will look into expanding our dedicated team that supports customers in vulnerable situations, enabling us to offer more personalised one-on-one assistance for those who find it difficult to engage through our standard contact channels. Additionally, we will explore alternative communication channels and collaborate with support agencies to assist customers who need extra support.
- We will explore the benefits of proactively calling customers on the PSR, where possible, who may be affected by incidents.
- Use data provided by smart metering to help customers get the best priced bill, with regular engagement and updates on consumption and bill costs. We will also look at customers with low consumption or no consumption to see if extra help is needed.

SETTLD

SETTLD is a free, simple, and secure 'tell us once' end-of-life service we introduced in February 2022. It is the first time a water company in the UK has joined forces with a bereavement administration service to help ease the end-of-life admin stress for their customers.

The service allows next-of-kin to send us, and all other companies, a death notification by completing just one form. Once a next-of-kin has completed a SETTLD form, it updates customers on the closure or transfer of all accounts through digital notifications. This drives a faster resolution and removes effort and admin from the applicant, giving them more time to focus on what matters. In addition, SETTLD is rated an excellent **4.9/5** for customer satisfaction from its users.

SETTLD is rated an excellent 4.9/5 for customer satisfaction from its users.



10. EMPLOYEE INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND EQUITY

Why it's important

Understanding the diversity in our business is key to helping us support colleagues and the communities we serve. Our ambitions include working towards a more diverse workforce, which reflects all customers throughout our regions and will improve what we do and how we do it.

For us, diversity helps our success and ability to innovate, with different people bringing skills and thinking to improve what we do and how we do it.

What we've done

In 2022 we launched our TIDE Strategy (TIDE: Together for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity), which outlines our commitment to a workforce representing the different cultures, backgrounds and viewpoints of the communities we serve.

We have organised networks for colleagues based on their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability to make sure that they have a safe space to connect on matters that relate to their particular characteristic.

We are proud to be named one of the UK's Best Workplace for Women, achieving a 20th place ranking in the Super Large Category, published by Great Place to Work UK. As the only water and sewerage company to feature, we are among 350 standout companies across four size categories.

Working in partnership with other organisations will support us in achieving our TIDE ambitions. For example, we have been working with organisations that are leaders and experts in areas including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and social deprivation.



Our partners for the lifetime of this strategy are:

Gender

Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)

Disability

Business Disability Forum (BDF)

Social Deprivation

Community Groups

Our plan for 2025-30

Community Engagement

We already have a wide-ranging community engagement strategy with teams and volunteers available for community events. We will further use that engagement to inform and support our TIDE targets. Additionally, we will use future census data to give us information on the broader picture of customer characteristics.

Community Information

Many of our 'minority' communities have groups and forums that we can tap into to offer advice and support. Some of these communities have traditionally been seen as 'hard to reach', and we will liaise with local councils in our operating areas to connect with community leads and representatives.

Customer Participation

We routinely use community and customer forums that provide an important structure for listening to the voices of our customers. It is vitally important that we make sure these environments are representative of our customers, and we will work hard to make sure the composition of these groups reflects the diverse communities we serve.

Recruitment

A deeper and broader connection in local communities will aid our TIDE recruitment targets. A greater profile in our minority communities will, in the long-term, see NWG as an employer of choice as more customers become aware of all our services. We are connecting with schools, colleges, and universities to promote and expand our apprenticeship programme.

Our plan includes a full review of our job advertising to remove any perceived barriers around gender or ethnicity, so they are inclusive and open to everyone, with training for all recruiting managers to support on selection and how to adjust our approach to encourage diversity.

This will contribute to us being seen as more than just 'the water bill' in communities where our profile currently is no more than that.

Diversity and Inclusion

We have developed a gender diversity action plan to reduce the gap in gender pay and our Management Development programme includes training to make sure that our workplaces are inclusive, and that our organisational values are delivered consistently.



7. HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE GET THERE?

Our measures indicate progress on water poverty and the satisfaction of our customers who receive additional financial and non-financial support.

We also measure the overall perception of value for money. While this is a perception measure, it is the best way to assess views of whether the cost of our services for all our customers is appropriate.

We are confident in our ability to deliver our plans, and we give our commitment over the coming years to do so.

To support the delivery of our plans, we closely monitor our progress on key metrics.

We have an identified Independent Non-executive Director (INeD) who has specific responsibility for overseeing all things relating to our Unrivalled Customer Experience Strategy and Inclusivity Strategy.

They are also the link between our Board and the Water Forum, attending Water Forum meetings and reporting back to our Board.

Formally, we provide annual feedback on performance to the Water Forum and our designated INeD who, together, review our Inclusivity Strategy.

We provide continuous regular feedback to and seek feedback from our customers, our Board, the Water Forum, strategic partners, and stakeholders.

We have included the following targets into our company scorecard, which ensures that they are reviewed monthly by our CEO and leadership team. Outside of the scorecard, we have further metrics which will help us monitor our progress. These can all be found on the table to the right. Our board will be tracking the progress of the strategy against customer commitments.

Every year we will:

- Provide an up-to-date and detailed assessment of water poverty within our operating areas to track progress in areas and demographics.
- Achieve **BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458** which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and are continually looking to improve and be innovative with the services we provide.
- Achieve the **Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark**, which is based on customer satisfaction feedback and an assessment of employee engagement with our customer service strategy.
- Achieve the Institute of Customer Service Training Mark, which demonstrates that our training courses meet national standards for customer service. an assessment of employee engagement with our customer service strategy.

We have added a table showing how we will check if our vulnerability strategy is helping our customers and meeting our ambitious plans.

	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26
	Top 2 Water Companies	Top 2 Water Companies	Top 2 Water Companies	Top 2 Water Companies	Top 2 Water Companies
CIMEX					
Priority Services reach - % of households we have registered on PSR	14.60%	17.10%	20%	22.30%	25%
Priority Services Customers where we have attempted to contact to update their PSR records every 2 years - current target 11.5% -	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%
Priority Services Customers where we have made contact to update their PSR records every 2 years	35%	35%	35%	35%	35%
PSR customer satisfaction with services	88%	90%	92%	93%	95%
Employees completing PSR awareness training	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Water poverty - % of customers who are paying more than 5% of net income on their water bill	7%	5.25%	3.50%	1.75%	0%
Support customers with bill reductions on top of social tariffs from our Financial Hardship Fund each year	£4m	£4m	£4m	£4m	£4m
Number of customers receiving debt support payments	3,250	3,500	3,750	4,000	4,500
Independent Trust Survey - Water Matters	8.8	8.8	8.8	8.8	8.8
Awareness of non-financial support	65%	67.50%	70%	72.50%	75%
Stakeholder trust tracking research	8.90%	8.90%	8.90%	8.90%	8.90%
BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458 accreditation	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
BSI Kitemark for Service Excellence	In Progress	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Institute of Customer Service Mark accreditation	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Institute of Customer Service Training Mark accreditation	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
Stakeholder engagement sessions held each year	2	4	4	4	6
% of our employees involved in Just an Hour giving time to our community	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
Number of community events attended to promote PSR and financial support	350	375	400	425	450

APPENDIX

Our plans for 2025-30

This section sets out our plans up to 2030 and when we aim to deliver them. We've also shown whether each action supports Ofwat's 'Service for All' and 'Paying Fair' guidance.

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
Water poverty	We plan to remove 300,000 households from water poverty through a social tariff scheme at 5%.	Long term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	In addition, we forecast that our company-funded scheme will benefit 25,000 households by the end of 2030.	Long term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	Aligning our plans and support packages for addressing water poverty at 5% in line with the newly established industry measure of water poverty will help to create a greater consistency of support between companies making it easier for customers to understand when they can get help.	Long term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	Maintaining our commitment to eradicate water poverty at 3% will leave us with a gap in the region of 117,000 households. We will work to minimise any negative impact through further innovations, driving efficiency, providing holistic support, and exploring alternative funding sources.	Long term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	From 2025, we will introduce our new Financial Hardship fund – with a £20m contribution from our shareholders over the next five years.	Short term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6

Service for all and Paying Fair key

Service for all

- 1 High standard of service and support
- 2 Inclusive design
- 3 Identifying customers
- 4 Recording needs
- 5 Vulnerability strategies

Paying Fair

- 1 Help make it easy for all customers to pay their water bill
- 2 Make sure customers who are eligible for help receive it when it's needed
- 3 Treat customers that have their accounts managed by agents as customers of the company
- 4 Be proactive in contacting customers in debt
- 5 Be clear, courteous and non-threatening to customers in debt
- 6 Agree payments that are right for each customers
- 7 Treat customers facing debt recovery action with care

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
Innovative tariffs	We will support large households or people with limited control over water use due to household composition (for example, families with children or those with medical conditions).	Medium term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	We are looking for opportunities to use innovative tariffs to phase any negative impact of compulsory metering, which we will introduce in Essex and Suffolk only from 2025. This might include, for example, capping charges for high water users who cannot effectively manage their usage, such as larger households or lower-income households with a medical need where benefits are not paid.	Short term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	We will trial a water-saving tariff alongside our smart metering programme to reward customers who reduce their consumption.	Medium term	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	We will complete annual engagement sessions with customers and partners to understand the opportunities to deliver tariffs that support our customers, with focus on horizon scanning and how we deliver tariffs that support our digitally excluded customers.	Medium term	2	1 2 4 6
	We will share lessons learned from incidents with stakeholders so that we can improve how we support customers and prevent foreseeable harm.	Short term	1 2 3 4	
Support when there is an interruption to the water supply	We are introducing a four stage priority for delivery of bottled water, depending on ability to collect and dependence of water.	Short term	1 3	

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
Customer and stakeholder participation	We will continue to invest in our communities through initiatives like Just an Hour, encouraging employees to give back to causes they care about.	Short term	3	
	We will organise annual events that bring together local and regional organisations, building stronger relationships with them and increasing awareness of the support we can offer.	Short term	1 3	
	We will also continue to engage with customers on a large scale, offering valuable services like lead pipe replacement, water efficiency advice, and financial support as needed.	Short term	1	
	Our new community vehicles are out and about ahead of our Smart metering programme, attending events and dropping in to community settings to engage with our customers.	Short term	1 3	1 2
Expand our strategic partnerships and nurture regional and local relationships	We will become Scope Utilities partners. This will help provide specialist support and help to help reduce costs and improve the services we offer disabled people.	Short term	2 3 5	2
	We will introduce partnership ambassadors to expand regional partnerships with organisations who support customers when they need a little extra help.	Short term	1 3 4	1 2 4 6
	Build strong community partnerships in Essex and Suffolk linked to our smart metering roll-out.	Short term	1 3 4	1 2 4 6
	Build on a trial that saw our people working in the same office as Believe Housing, to offer a more holistic customer support experience, to develop a 'one-stop shop' approach to support housing providers and other partners.	Medium term	1 3	1 2
	Expand our partnerships, for example, we have already worked with Gateshead Council and Citizens Advice Gateshead to support their warm spaces initiative over the winter months. We're committed to making donations to help offset the additional costs for water use incurred by the smaller organisations offering these services.	Medium term	1 3 4	1 2 4 6

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
	Work with TransUnion (credit reference agency) to give our customers access to their credit information which will drive awareness, share insight, and provide education and alerts to support them in taking steps to improve their credit score and overall financial well-being.	Medium term	1	2
	We're leading the Task and Finishing Group responsible for delivering Waterwise's strategic objective to include water efficiency measures in building retrofit programmes, including achieving net zero.	Medium term		
	Continually review customer feedback, and the levels of engagement and support provided in each area. Expand the use of external data working in collaboration with Open Maps to develop a tool for measuring and assessing community vulnerability.	Medium term	1 2	2
	We will consult with our customers through various channels of engagement to understand which organisations would be valuable to partner with- so we're seeking the customer's view in building our plans and strategies.	Short term	1 2 5	
Building awareness of our help	We will enhance our targeted communications campaigns for each circumstance, by adding personalisation within these approaches.	Short term	3	1 2
	We will expand awareness campaigns, including radio, TV adverts, Tik Tok and SnapChat.	Short term	3	1 2
	Rebranding our inclusivity messaging following customer research.	Short term	3	1 2
	We're expanding our Inclusivity Awareness training for all employees and partners working on our behalf.	Short term	1 3	
	We will integrate our general marketing communication campaigns to better highlight the financial and non-financial services we offer, personalised and tailored to customers unique circumstances.	Short term	3	1 2

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
	We will work with partners and stakeholders to share key messages across all available channels to make sure we have maximum exposure and reach.	Short term	1 3 4	1 2 4 6
	We will work to support customer adoption and education of digital tools, and we will offer alternative routes of communication where social media and digital tools are unavailable.	Long tyerm	2	
	We will review our use of alternative literature and how we can promote payment options in a variety of formats and languages.	Medium term	1 2	
	We will continue to use demographic data and insights to identify those who are most in need of registering for additional support, both Priority Services and financial assistance.	Short term	1 3 5	1 2
Inclusivity awareness for all employees	Create an enhanced inclusivity training package for employees co-designed with Northern Gas Networks and the National Energy Action group.	Medium term	1 3	
	Work with the Alzheimer's Society to become a Dementia Friends company.	Medium term	3	
	Support colleagues in our field teams with full information of customers' needs and provide them with the tools to enable easy sign up to our support schemes.	Medium term	1 3	
	Host regular diversity and inclusion sessions that are open to all employees.	Short term		
	Provide in-depth training for recruiting managers around diversity and inclusion.	Short term		
	Inform our teams to develop an enhanced understanding of the different characteristics and needs and a toolkit of resources they can share with customers, friends and family.	Medium term	2 3	
	Use diversity and inclusion networks to increase external engagement.	Short term	1 2 3	

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
Sharing customer data	Expansion of PSR data sharing for all regions.	Medium term	1 3	
	Data-sharing agreements with local authorities and housing providers in our operating areas and incorporated PSR in our scheduled agreements with local authorities.	Short term	1 3	2
	Arrangements to share data with trusted partner organisations, with customers' consent, so that customers who need extra support do not have to keep providing information to multiple organisations.	Medium term	1 3	2
	Support For All - a single online support hub to allow energy and water companies to share details of who is on their PSR. The ambition is for this to eventually lead to data being shared by utility providers to make it easier for customers in need of financial help to be identified and helped at an earlier stage.	Medium term	1 3	
	Expanded partnerships with the National Health Service (NHS).	Medium term	3	
	Expand data sharing of Priority Services records from needs codes only to include the tailored services required by customers to deliver a more robust one stop service.	Medium term	1 4	
Being easy to access using channels of customers' choice	As part of our smart metering implementation, we will support customers in moving to monthly electronic billing. This will help their understanding of the link between how much water they use and their bill and also mean new home movers will receive their first bills more quickly. We will:	Long term		1 6
	Make our digital experiences more personal to the customer, highlighting information they need or would find useful at each point in the online journey.	Medium term	2	1
	Use proactive notifications such as in-app and web notifications, including push notifications, in our mobile app and text messaging to flag changes in how much water they are using to alert them to possible increases in water use.	Medium term	1	

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
	Enhance our digital capabilities to offer our customers more flexibility and control of their payment plans.	Medium term	1	1 2
	Make it easier for customers to get the help they need by creating an online tool that will allow customers to assess their eligibility and suitability for additional services such as affordability schemes, Priority Services, water metering and efficiency.	Medium term	2 3	1
	We continue to strive for even greater accessibility by actively exploring new features, including the potential integration of sign language translation for our website content.	Medium term	1 2	
	Simplify online registration and access to our services and provide better options so all customers can manage their accounts and services online.	Medium term	1 2	1
	Build our understanding of customer behaviour on their use of our digital products through customer insight data and customer research to shape what we deliver in the future.	Medium term	2	
	Make sure all information is given at a relevant time, as well as consistent messaging across all platforms and channels of choice.	Medium term	2	
	We will look into expanding our dedicated team that supports customers in vulnerable situations, enabling us to offer more personalised one-on-one assistance for those who find it difficult to engage through our standard contact channels.	Short term	1	
	Use data provided by smart metering to help customers get the best priced bill, with regular engagement and updates on consumption and bill costs.	Short term		1

Focus area	Our plan for 2025-30	Timescale (long, medium or short term plan)	Service for all	Paying Fair
Employee inclusion, diversity and equity	We already have a wide-ranging community engagement strategy with teams and volunteers available for community events. We will further use that engagement to inform and support our TIDE targets.	Medium term		
	Many of our 'minority' communities have groups and forums that we can tap into to offer advice and support. Some of these communities have traditionally been seen as 'hard to reach', and we will liaise with local councils in our operating areas to connect with community leads and representatives.	Medium term	3	
	We routinely use community and customer forums that provide an important structure for listening to the voices of our customers. It is vitally important that we make sure these environments are representative of our customers, and we will work hard to make sure the composition of these groups reflects the diverse communities we serve.	Short term	2	
	A deeper and broader connection in local communities will aid our TIDE recruitment targets. A greater profile in our minority communities will, in the long term, see NWG as an employer of choice as more customers become aware of all our services. We are connecting with schools, colleges, and universities to promote and expand our apprenticeship programme.	Short term		
	We have developed a gender diversity action plan to reduce the gap in gender pay and our Management Development programme includes training to make sure that our workplaces are inclusive, and that our organisational values are delivered consistently.	Medium term		

OUR GUARANTEED STANDARDS OF SERVICE

Our customers are at the heart of everything we do

If we fall below the high standards we set ourselves, we'll pay for the inconvenience.



What we'll pay you automatically

We'll pay £20

- If we don't respond to a **question about your bill** within 10 working days.
- If you write to ask us to **change how you pay** and we're unable to do this and don't let you know within 5 working days.
- If we have access to your meter and don't provide you with a **bill based on an actual reading** (or a bill based on a reading you've provided) between 1 April and 31 March.
- If your water supply is **interrupted by our planned work** and we haven't let you know in advance.

We'll pay £25

- If your **water pressure drops** below the required standard for over an hour, twice within a 28 day period, as long as we know you've been affected and it was not caused by necessary work (i.e. emergency work to repair a burst main).

We'll pay £30

- If we need to **make an appointment** to visit you and we don't let you know if your appointment is in the morning (7am to 1pm), afternoon (12 noon to 6pm) or in a 2 hour time slot if you ask for this.
- If we need to **change your appointment** to visit you and can't give you 24 hours notice.
- If you let us know that you're concerned that your water may be **causing illness** in your household and we don't visit you in 4 hours.
- If your **water supply is off due to an emergency** and we don't turn it back on in 12 hours. We'll also pay you an extra £30 for each 12 hour period your water is off.
- If your **water supply is off for more than an hour due to planned work** and we don't restore your supply within the notice period. We'll pay an additional £30 for each 12 hour period your water is off.

We'll pay £50

- If we don't **reply to your complaint** within 10 working days.

We'll pay £75

- If the outside of your home is **flooded by one of our sewers**. If your sewerage bill for the year is more than £75, we will pay 50% of this.

We'll pay £100

- If the main living area of your home is **flooded due to a burst water main**. If your water bill for the year is more than £100, we'll pay this amount instead.

We'll pay £150

- If the inside of your property is **flooded from one of our sewers**. If your sewerage bill for the year is more than £150, we'll pay this amount instead.
- If we **incorrectly issue a County Court Judgment** against you or **incorrectly register a default** with a credit reference agency.

What you can claim

We'll pay £20

- If we've **blocked the access to your home** during our planned non-emergency work and haven't told you in advance.
- If we ask you to **boil your water** for more than 72 hours.

We'll pay £50

- If we **incorrectly issue a County Court claim** against you when the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), social services or a debt advice agency have asked us not to.

We'll pay £100

- If we issue a **County Court claim** and you've already paid your bill. We'll also withdraw the claim.

You can find full details of our Guaranteed Standards Scheme, in our leaflet "Our Promise to You" online at nwl.co.uk/code along with our codes of practice for debt, leaks, complaints and metering.



