

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair and a gold ring on her finger, using a pink hairdryer to dry a young child's brown hair. The child is smiling and has their eyes closed. The woman is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The child is wearing a brown sweater with a black pattern. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

FOR EVERYONE

Our customer inclusivity
strategy 2025-30

**NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER** *living water*

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

INTRODUCTION

In developing this 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.

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 deliver tailored support to help through temporary or long term needs.



2. OUR PLAN FOR 2025-30

The headlines



Moving **400,000** households out of water poverty.



Over **250,000** customers registered for Priority Services.



Inclusivity training to **100%** of employees.

EVERY CUSTOMER MATTERS



Priority Services:

is a free service that could help you, your family, or friends. It helps us give you extra support when you need it. This could be due to age, disability, mobility, illness, mental health, communication needs, life changes (such as pregnancy) or if you have children under the age of five.

www.nwl.co.uk/priorityservices

www.eswater.co.uk/priorityservices



Financial support:

There are many ways we can help you, from payment plans and low income discounts to advice on saving water which can help lower your energy bills too. If you're struggling to pay your bills or falling into debt, please get in touch.

www.nwl.co.uk/bill-help

www.eswater.co.uk/bill-help

3. WAYS WE CAN HELP - AT A GLANCE

Financial support



Flexible payment plan:

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



Payment breaks:

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



Low-income discount:

If your household has a low income or you receive Pension Credit, we may be able to offer up to **50%** off your water bills.



Benefit checker:

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



Budget shortfall:

If you're struggling to manage your day-to-day bills and have more money going out than coming in each month, we may be able to lower your payments by up to **50%**.



Debt support:

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



Bill cap scheme – WaterSure:

We may be able to cap your water bills if you have a water meter and receive income related benefits, and have a large family or a medical condition that uses lots of water.



Water Direct – using benefit payments:

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





Non-financial support



Stay safe in your home - set a password:

Protect your home from scammers and bogus callers. We'll use your chosen password when we call or visit, so you know it's really us.



Translation services:

If English is not your first language, we can provide a telephone interpreter. You can also translate our website by clicking language options at the bottom of the page.



Water delivered to you if supply is interrupted:

We aim to restore your water within three hours. If you have limited mobility or need water for medical needs, we'll deliver water to you during an interruption.



Nominate someone to manage your account:

You can nominate a carer, relative or family member to manage your account. They can speak to us on your behalf and we can send them your bills and letters.



Extra support:

You can let us know if you want more time to answer the phone or door if we call or visit you. We can also read your water meter for you if you find it difficult to take a meter reading.



Living with autism:

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



Communicating with you in different formats:

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



Cognitive impairment including dyslexia and dementia:

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

4. PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER

We want to make it as easy as possible to register on our Priority Services Register. We can do this directly with you, with a representative on your behalf or through securely shared data from partner organisations.

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

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

We will contact customers on our Priority Services Register at least every two years to update their Priority Services records. If you use our customer app you will be prompted to update your records when you log on.

To help you 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.**

You 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
- In person
- By email



Contact Details

Website address

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

Scan QR code:



Northumbrian Water



Essex & Suffolk Water

Call us on:

Northumbrian Water:
0345 733 5566

Essex & Suffolk Water:
0345 782 0111

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



5. SUPPORT WHEN THERE IS AN INTERRUPTION TO WATER SUPPLY

We know that an interruption to the water supply can impact customers, especially those who need the supply due to medical conditions or those who have limited mobility.

Where we have mobile phone numbers or email addresses for customers, we will contact them directly. We will use our social media platforms and our websites to spread the messages wider, and for major incidents we would 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.

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

Our plan for 2025-30

- If there's a prolonged water interruption affecting your area, we'll set up welcoming drop-in centres in local community spaces with our trusted partners. These centres will give easy access to clean water, toilets and showers, a warm, comfortable space and hot drinks and food so customers can stay safe, supported, and looked after in their own communities.

- We'll keep customers informed and supported during any service issues. If something goes wrong, we'll have strong plans in place to make sure updates are clear and reliable.

We have dedicated teams in place to respond swiftly and effectively when our operations are disrupted. This means customers can count on us to minimise delays, keep them informed with timely updates, and restore services as quickly as possible. By having the right people ready to act, we ensure that customers feel supported, reassured, and confident that their needs are being prioritised, even in challenging situations.

We have enrolled over **250 employee** volunteers to support our communities with delivery of bottled water (to Priority Services customers) and sharing messages where there is an interruption.

They can support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



We can deliver 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.

We also have larger ones for schools, care homes or a group of businesses.

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

Update your details with us online

www.nwl.co.uk/managingaccount

www.eswater.co.uk/managingaccount

6. HOW TO ENGAGE WITH US

We will continue to offer various contact methods for those who prefer non-digital contact, including home visits and community engagement, to make sure everyone can access our services. We have community engagement vehicles driven by specially trained teams so that we can bring support and advice directly into your community.

We have:

- Used envelopes as well as bills to promote the wide range of support available because some people don't open their bills.
- Provided Recite Me, an accessibility toolbar, across all our website to allow for translation and tailoring of individual needs.
- Launched WhatsApp as a contact channel.



Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

- Support customers in moving to monthly electronic billing as part of our smart metering plan. This will help their understanding of the link between how much water they use and their bill and mean new home movers will receive their first bills more quickly.
- Improve digital experiences by personalising customer information and using notifications to alert them about their water use.
- Enhance digital features to give customers more control over payment plans and create tools to help them assess eligibility for services like discounts and metering.
- Simplify online registration and access, allowing better account management and reducing the need to repeat information.
- Use customer data to improve future digital services and ensure consistent messaging across all platforms.
- Always be available to contact on the phone.

Accreditations

We are delighted to have achieved BSI Kitemark Accreditation (for inclusive services) for a second year, demonstrating our focus on providing excellent service to customers in vulnerable circumstances.

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.

Every year we will:

Achieve BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458 which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and that we are continually looking to improve, and be innovative with the services we provide and how we provide them.

Engage with us through any of these contact methods



Website address:

nwl.co.uk or
eswater.co.uk

Scan the QR codes:

Northumbrian
Water:



Essex &
Suffolk Water:



Call us on:

Northumbrian Water:

0345 733 5566

Essex &
Suffolk Water:

0345 782 0111

7. HERE TO HELP: INCLUSIVE SUPPORT FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS

We want our employees to have awareness of the broad range of needs our diverse customers have, and have tools to support or further signpost them to additional services. Key to this is delivering our Inclusivity Awareness training across our organisation.

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.

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.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

- Develop a comprehensive inclusivity training package with Northern Gas Networks and the National Energy Action group.
- Improve affordability training for personalised communication and solutions.
- Collaborate with the Alzheimer's Society to become a Dementia Friends company.
- Equip field teams with customer information and tools for support scheme sign-ups.
- Hold regular diversity and inclusion sessions for all employees and provide specialised training for recruiting managers.
- Enhance team understanding of diverse needs with a resource toolkit and use diversity networks for external engagement.

We use external data to understand our customers and target support as needs change. For example, we've mapped postcodes against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation to identify the most deprived neighbourhoods. This includes metrics on income, education, health, crime risk, housing access, and environment quality. We're also collaborating with Open Maps and energy providers to develop a tool for measuring community vulnerability.

We will continue to find ways to understand our customers' needs and how best to prepare for their changing needs in the future.



NEXT STEPS



Every year we will:

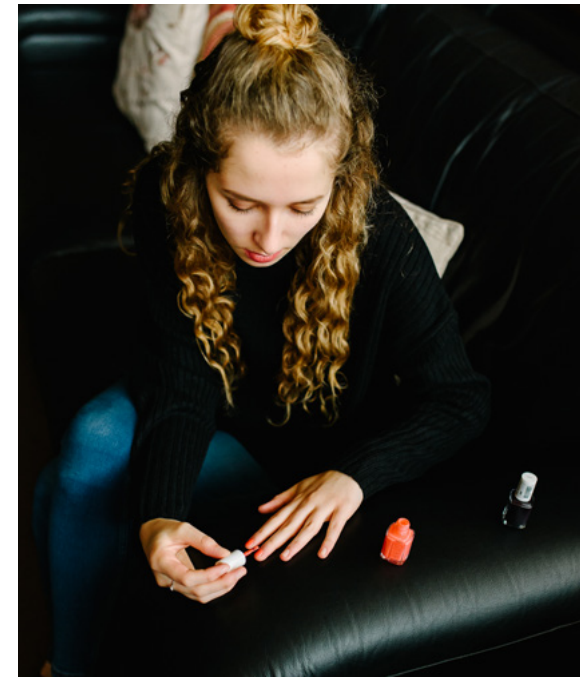
- Provide an up-to-date and detailed assessment of water poverty within our operating areas to track progress.
- Achieve BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458 which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and are continually looking to improve and be innovative with the services we provide and how we provide them.

By 2030 we will:

- Increase awareness of our Priority Services to **75%** and keep awareness at this level as a minimum.
- Attempt to contact **90%** of households which have at least one individual registered on the PSR every two years to make sure they are still receiving the right support. We will make actual contact with at least **35%** of households.
- Have over **250,000** customers (25% of households) registered for Priority Services.
- Provide inclusivity training to **100% of employees**.

Join our online community, **Have Your Say**, which is a friendly place where you can chat with us, and other customers, about anything and everything to do with these services.

If you want to know more about anything covered in this summary, you can read our full Inclusivity Strategy **here**.



OUR PLANS FOR 2025-30

This section sets out our plans for up to 2030. For full details of our plans, please see our [Inclusivity Strategy](#).

WATER POVERTY

1

We plan to remove approximately **300,000** households, 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**.

2

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.

3

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.

4

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.

INNOVATIVE TARIFFS

1

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.

2

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.

3

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.

SUPPORT WHEN THERE IS AN INTERRUPTION TO WATER SUPPLY

- 1 We will share lessons learned from incidents with stakeholders so that we can improve how we support customers, and prevent foreseeable harm.
- 2 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.
- 3 We are introducing a four stage priority for delivery of bottled water, depending on ability to collect and dependence of water. As an example with priority one this will cover those on dialysis, those who have poor sense of smell/taste or are water dependent.

CUSTOMER AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

- 1 We will continue to invest in our communities through initiatives like Just an Hour, encouraging employees to give back to causes they care about.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 Engagement with external awareness campaigns, such as Talk Money Week and Dementia Action Week.
- 5 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.
- 6 We're committed to making a positive impact on our communities, engaging customers in our journey, and pioneering sustainable solutions for a brighter future.
- 7 We will use our community vehicles out to attend events and drop in community setting to engage with our customers.

EXPAND OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND NURTURE REGIONAL AND LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

- 1** Become Scope Utilities partners. This will help provide specialist support and help to help reduce costs and improve the services we offer disabled people.
- 2** Introduce partnership ambassadors to expand regional partnerships with organisations who support customers when they need a little extra help.
- 3** 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.
- 4** 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.
- 5** 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.
- 6** 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.
- 7** We're leading the Task and Finishing Group responsible for delivering Waterwise's objective to include water efficiency measures in building retrofit programmes, including achieving net zero.
- 8** 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.
- 9** We will continue to 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.

BUILDING AWARENESS OF OUR HELP

- 1 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.
- 2 We're expanding our Inclusivity Awareness 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 '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.
- 5 We will integrate our general marketing communication campaigns to better highlight the financial and non-financial services we offer, personalised and tailored to a customer's unique circumstances.
- 6 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.
- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 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 help. Our partnership efforts will focus on communities where customers need the most support.

TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

- 1 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.
- 2 Refine our affordability training to provide tailored communications and solutions.
- 3 Work with the Alzheimer's Society to become a Dementia Friends company.
- 4 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.
- 5 Host regular diversity and inclusion sessions that are open to all employees.
- 6 Provide in-depth training for recruiting managers around diversity and inclusion.
- 7 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.
- 8 Use diversity and inclusion networks to increase external engagement.

SHARING CUSTOMER DATA

1

Expansion of PSR data sharing for all regions.

2

Data-sharing agreements with local authorities and housing providers in our operating areas and incorporated PSR in our scheduled agreements with local authorities.

3

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.

4

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.

5

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.

6

Expanded partnerships with the National Health Service (NHS).

7

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.

EASILY ACCESSIBLE THROUGH CHANNELS OF CUSTOMERS' CHOICE

- 1 Make our digital experiences more personal to the customer, highlighting information they need or would find useful at each point in the online journey.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 Make sure all information is given at a relevant time, as well as consistent messaging across all platforms and channels of choice.
- 10 We will look into expanding our dedicated team that supports customers in vulnerable situations, enabling us to offer more personalised one-on-one help 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.
- 11 We will explore the benefits of proactively calling customers on the PSR where possible, who may be affected by incidents.
- 12 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.

EMPLOYEE INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, AND EQUITY

1

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 (Together for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity) targets. Additionally, we will use future census data to give us information on the broader picture of customer characteristics.

2

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.

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.

4

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.

5

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

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

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

ESSEX&SUFFOLK
WATER *living water*