

EVERY CUSTOMER MATTERS

Our strategy and
performance

Updated June 2024



Wessex Water
YTL GROUP



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Foreword

We have been living through unprecedented times with Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis continuing to have an impact on everyone's lives. But our concern has been greatest for the hardship felt by customers who need extra help.

Looking ahead, we are planning significant but essential investment to deliver a highly ambitious set of outcomes, including tackling pollution, enhancing the water environment, and ensuring there is enough water to cater for everyone's needs over the long term. But we are very conscious that this will add increased pressure on customers as bills are regrettably going to rise.

Water must continue to be affordable for all so our goal is to eradicate water poverty across our region - no one will spend more than 5% of their disposable income on water by 2030. We will do this by increasing the number of customers receiving tailored financial support through discounted tariffs or other affordability schemes.

Some of our customers need extra help in other ways. That could be how we communicate with them or the help we offer during events such as supply interruptions, for instance providing bottled water. We continue to tailor our day-to-day service to those customers through Priority Services.

We want all customers to know there is extra help available to them whatever their need. This strategy sets out a number of initiatives designed to raise awareness of the support we offer and make it as easy and quick as possible to access our services. We will auto-enrol customers onto discounted tariffs or Priority Services where we can by using data to identify those in need or sharing information with other organisations.

Working in partnership with others allows us to meet our goals. We are always looking at ways to work better and more effectively with our existing wide range of partners and develop new relationships. Their insight is invaluable to us as we continue to shape our support schemes to meet the changing needs of our customers.

In February 2024 Ofwat, our economic regulator, introduced a new principles-based customer focused condition into water companies' operating licences. Two of those principles relate specifically to services for customers who need extra help and are underpinned by extensive supporting guidance. We have carefully judged ourselves against the expectations in this guidance and believe we are compliant.

We have also engaged further with our customers, partners, and stakeholders to get their views on the services we provide and this strategy as a whole. They were very positive.

This document, Every Customer Matters, was first published in 2018. It sets out how our service is accessible and inclusive for all. We update it each year and this time we have incorporated any suggestions made by customers, partners and stakeholders in our latest research and added information to evidence compliance with the new licence condition. We hope you enjoy learning about our ethos and values, the work we've done in this important area to date and our plans to widen support in the future up to 2030.



Looking ahead, we are planning significant but essential investment to deliver a highly ambitious set of outcomes

Tim Gardam

Independent Non-executive Director

Foreword

Wessex Water has a strong commitment to customer service and a duty of care to people who may be vulnerable that permeates the company as a whole. This is reflected in the long-standing and extensive programme of support for customers whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable either financially or to disruptions to their water supply or sewage service. Despite being in the vanguard of such provision we are impressed by the continued commitment to do more and to do it better that is evident in the pages that follow.

As independent co-chairs we particularly welcome the collaborative and open way that Wessex Water has engaged with the Vulnerability Advisory Panel and their willingness to listen and act on our views. The Panel meets twice a year to support, advise and challenge Wessex Water's Customer Policy team with the development and implementation of this Vulnerability Strategy. This includes discussions to ensure that the strategy focusses on the right issues and identify where new initiatives are required to deal with emerging needs, as well as monitoring the delivery and effectiveness of existing commitments and initiatives.

This year we were supported in this work by research, commissioned by Wessex Water, to give vulnerable customers an opportunity to give their view on the key areas in this Vulnerability Strategy. We are really encouraged both by their very positive response to the strategy and the speed with which Wessex Water has acted on their challenges to be bolder in some of their targets.

Times continue to be challenging for water customers who are still experiencing the long-term effects of both the Covid pandemic and subsequent rapid rises in the cost of living. Wessex Water was quick to respond to both, consulting the Panel on the adequacy of their existing schemes of support and on the best ways of providing additional financial support to money advice services. Inevitably our focus has been on affordability, but, at the same time, we have worked with Wessex Water to look at other vulnerabilities such as identifying groups of customers that may need additional support such as households needing to use additional water because of a health condition and considering ways of supporting customers with specific communication needs.

We congratulate Wessex Water on their approach to making sure that Every Customer Matters.



Elaine Kempson and Suzanne Wigmore
Co-chairs of the Vulnerability Advisory Panel

We particularly welcome the collaborative and open way that Wessex Water has engaged with the Vulnerability Advisory Panel

Our ethos - every customer matters

People don't like to think of themselves as in need of extra help, and most think the term could never apply to them. The reality is that anyone can need extra help at any time.

Vulnerability can be transitory or long term. It may be due to age, physical, or mental illness, literacy, unemployment, digital exclusion, or a sudden change in circumstances, like a bereavement or divorce.

As recent times have shown - first with the Covid pandemic, the cost of living crisis and external factors around the world, we can all need extra help.

That is why the starting point for our strategy is not to define or categorise vulnerability, but to build a service on the basis that every customer matters, always.

Our staff are trained and empowered to identify signs of vulnerability and go the extra mile. We give them the right tools, confidence and awareness to deal with complex situations

they may come across. And, through our many and varied partnerships with and funding of other agencies, our customers can access holistic advice and services.

We are proud, not just of the future plans outlined in this strategy, but of our existing, substantial record in customer service and our wealth of experience across the spectrum of activities designed to support customers who need extra help.

Throughout this document, you will read not just about our plans, but just as importantly, about our record - of customer care, of data sharing, of partnerships, of going the extra mile.

This experience supports and informs our strategy to 2030 and beyond. It combines with a commitment to innovation and communication that ensures our support programmes and initiatives will reach more people than ever before.

The values that inform our strategy for customers who need extra help

- We are committed to delivering customer care and service tailored to the individual.
- Our service is inclusive and accessible to all.
- We give staff the tools, training, confidence, and awareness to deal with complex situations.
- We work closely with other customer support organisations across our region.

And in terms of financial vulnerability specifically, we:

- believe that water use should not be rationed by a customer's ability

to pay - no one should be in water poverty

- encourage engagement with customers who are financially vulnerable
- build relationships of mutual trust with debt advice agencies/partners
- support a holistic approach to debt management
- offer tailored solutions with flexibility to meet an individual's financial circumstances
- prefer a sustainable and affordable level of payment of whatever size to no payment at all.

Customer focused licence condition

In February 2024 Ofwat, the economic regulator for water, introduced a new principles-based customer focused condition into water companies' operating licences. Two of the overarching principles relate specifically to services for customers who need extra help, financial or non-financial.

Both principles are underpinned by extensive supporting guidance, known as Service for all and Paying fair.

We have carefully judged ourselves against the many expectations in this guidance and are pleased that we are compliant.

We have included a summary of our compliance with Service for all as an appendix to this strategy and provided extensive information directly to Ofwat on Paying fair which has been published on Ofwat's website.

We have also mapped our initiatives on pages 26 to 37 against the individual expectations in the supporting guidance.

It's vital the financial support offered by water companies is well targeted to reach those who need it most which is why we support Wessex Water's continued efforts to help customers manage their bills, including making it quicker and easier for people to move to their Assist tariff.

We know many low-income customers don't expect to receive financial help from their water company so it's great that Wessex is working in partnership with organisations to help identify people who might benefit from assistance. People should find getting help if they're struggling to pay straightforward, so shouldn't hesitate to contact Wessex if they need help.

It is also great to see Wessex Water recognising that vulnerability goes beyond financial difficulties. Their vulnerability strategy shows that they have considered the challenges that can be faced by those with additional needs, and their intention to have an inclusive service for all of their customers.

Louise Mills - CCW

Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel (VAP)

Our VAP was set up in 2013 and consist of experts including representation from various stakeholders such as consumer bodies, government departments and CCW.

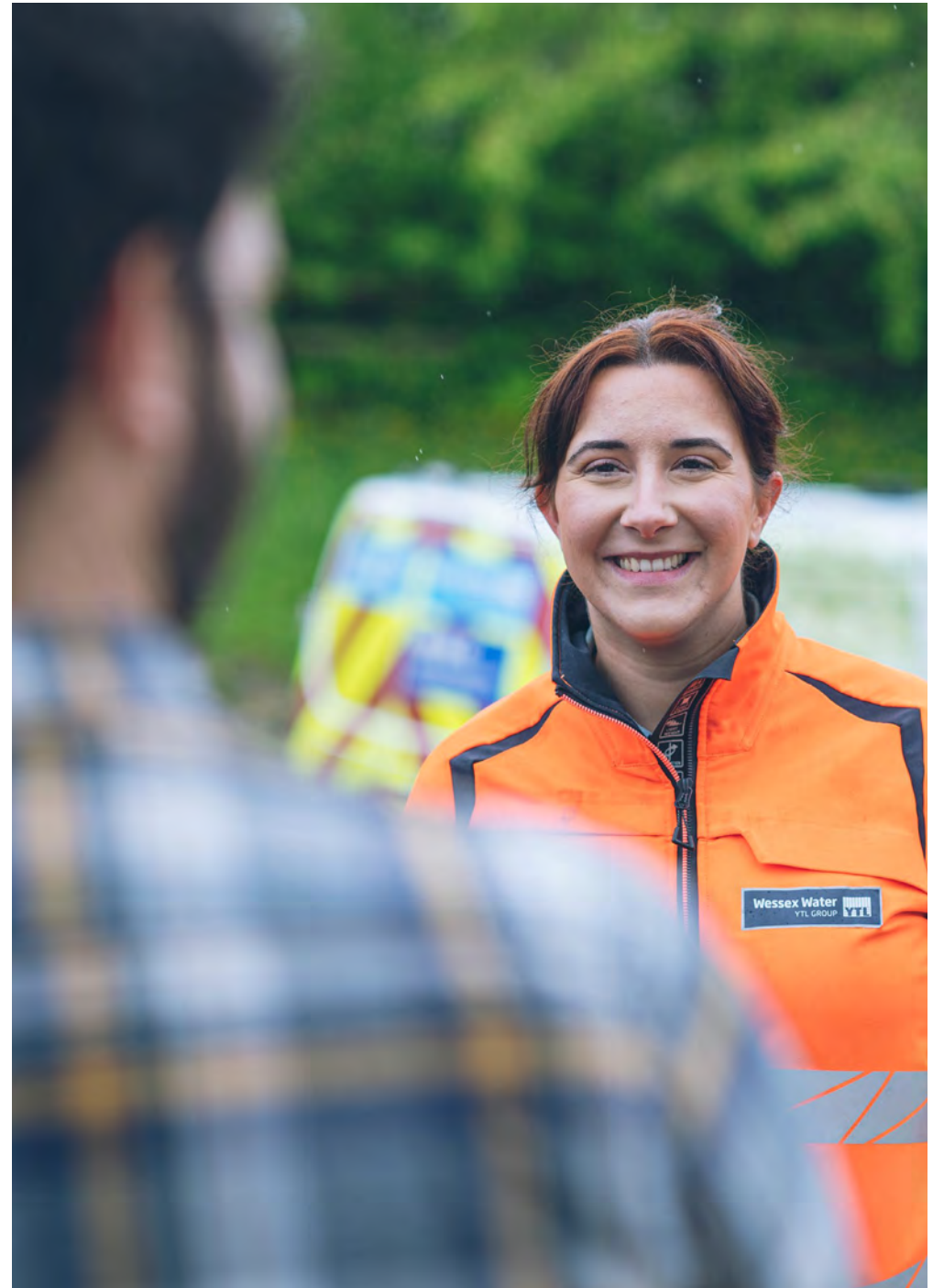
VAP support, advise and challenge our Vulnerability Strategy to ensure we are fulfilling our commitment to reach all our customers and, more recently, comply with the relevant principles of the customer focused licence condition.

We constantly review our strategy and monitor the delivery and effectiveness of our commitments and initiatives. We report regularly to the panel and seek their input to ensure we are focusing on the right areas and if any new initiatives need to be considered.

We have two independent Chairs Suzanne Wigmore CEO Wiltshire Citizen Advice and Professor Elaine Kempson Professor Emeritus University of Bristol. VAP is a sub group of our customer challenge panel (CCG). Members of our panel sit on the CCG and take views to that forum.

Our current members include:

Rob Sandells	StepChange Business Development Manager
Louise Mills	Policy Manager CCW
Caroline Buxton	Central Dorset Citizen Advice
David Inman	Corporate Director Rural Services Network
Helen Webb	National external partnerships manager - Christians Against Poverty
Ian Robinson	Money Advice Trust Head of Business Development
Sarah Cardy	CEO Age UK Wiltshire
Karen Taylor	Department of Work & Pensions Operations Manager Dorset, Wilts, Hants & IOW
Michael Paul	Disability rights UK Head of Advice & Information
Nikki Johnson	National Grid Electricity Distribution Social Obligations Manager
Laura Jones	Scope Partnership Account Manager
Andy Wood	Scope Utilities Partnerships Lead



What 'every customer matters' means in practice



Going the extra mile

When it comes to customer service it's often the little things that make a difference. We only have one opportunity to get it right.

GEM - going the extra mile - sums up our approach to customer service and putting 'customers at the heart'. We encourage staff to put themselves in the customer's shoes and give them the confidence to achieve the best outcome for that customer.

Our staff are trained to quickly recognise when a customer may need extra help and react in a way that provides immediate support.

For example, we recently launched an advanced GEM training course to help staff adapt their communication styles to put customers at ease which is particularly important when they need extra help.

Also our frontline staff in both our call centre and collections teams have been through specialist training with the Money Advice Trust to better spot and understand the signs of financial difficulty. They work to find the best solution for the customer depending on their financial circumstances to prevent them from falling into debt, and to make their bills affordable whether that is by the installation of a free water meter, flexible payment plan, low-rate tariff and/or our Restart debt repayment scheme.

Showing compassion. Being caring and sensitive. Thinking beyond just the situation in hand. Feeling empowered to do whatever it takes. Tailoring our service to the individual. These qualities are vital to the delivery of GEM, and vital to our ability to support customers who need extra help.

Accessible for everyone

We are committed to achieving the highest levels of customer satisfaction, through a customer's communication channel of choice, building trust and loyalty at the same time.

We're focusing more and more on the quality of interactions with customers, and we've extended our choice of channels. If, for example, a customer has suffered a bereavement, they might not feel like talking to someone on the phone and instead want a more 'faceless' but equally friendly interaction such as 'Live Chat' or using our online form.

In the event of an emergency, we can contact customers via text message.

We also signpost to notification services which limit the distress of notifying numerous organisations when a loved one passes away.

Whatever the chosen method, our customer care team holds the hand of the customer through their journey.

Through Priority Services, we provide additional methods of communication, which include:

- Relay UK text service
- home visits
- nominated carer/family member/ friend to talk to us or receive correspondence on a customer's behalf
- an interpreter through language line or SignLive
- bills and other communication in the customer's preferred choice such as Braille, large print, CD (on request), coloured paper (on request) or translated into another language.

We are also committed to making our website accessible. We've used Recite Me to allow our customers to customise the site in a way that works for them. Any YouTube video we produce has a Closed Caption (CC) option for subtitles.

We want our services to be accessible to all. As we are not prescriptive about how customers should contact us, we don't exclude anyone.

Looking for signs of extra needs and requirements

We improve the skills and knowledge of our telephone and field staff through specialist training, often developed and delivered by our advice partners. This includes Dementia Friends, mental health awareness, spotting the signs of financial difficulty and vulnerability, bereavement training, suicide awareness and deaf awareness. Our suite of vulnerability learning is available to all staff across the company, and all front-line staff are encouraged to complete all of the training available to them.

We focus on the quality of the interaction rather than speed of response. This ensures our staff have time to spend with customers who have more complex needs.

Training ensures our staff are sensitive, compassionate, and confident when it

comes to dealing with difficult and often complex situations, but crucially they can spot signs when things aren't right and encourage disclosure from customers. They are trained in the use of non-judgemental listening and appropriate language.

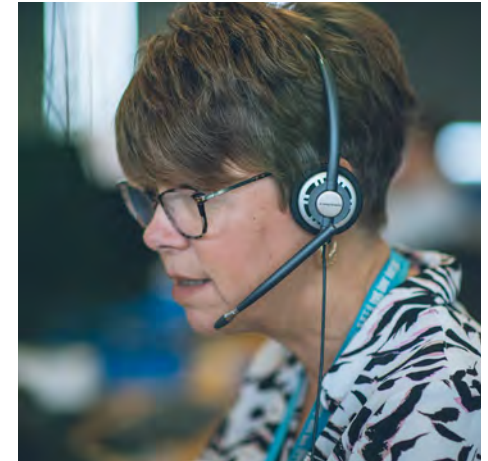
We take every opportunity to promote the support we offer as part of Priority Services and encourage sign up, offering many ways for customers to do so including online, over the phone or face to face with our field teams. Working with third parties, such as National Grid, also means the customer only needs to tell us once.

Our Vulnerability Experts cover all areas of the business to act as ambassadors for our vulnerability strategy and disseminate key

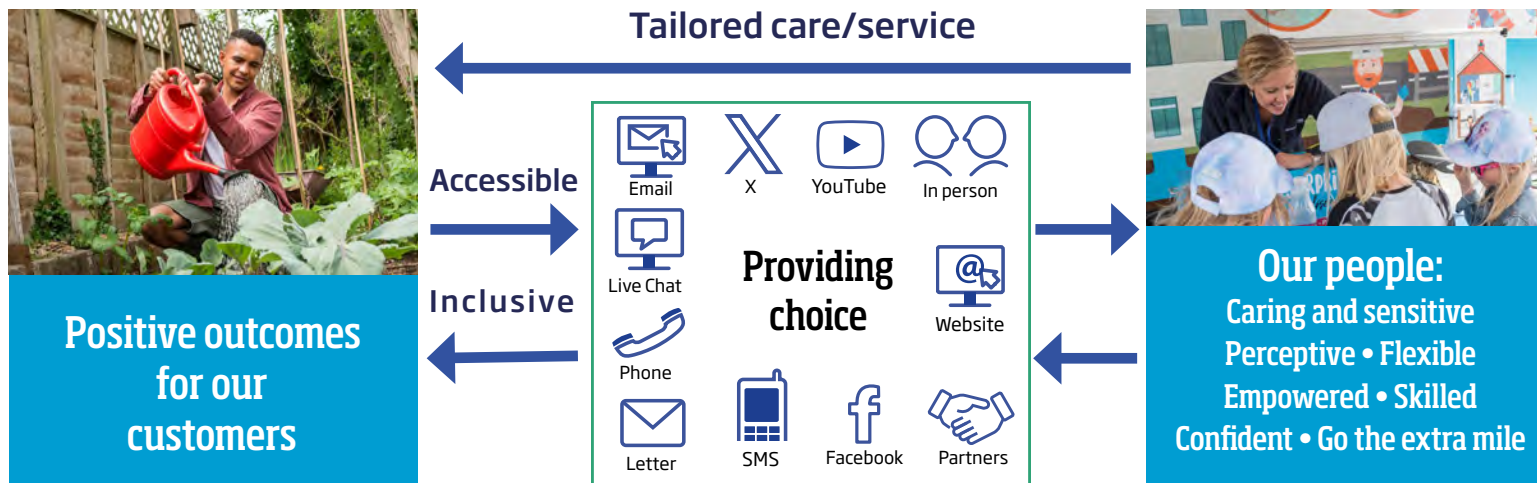
information throughout their teams. We provide specialist training for them to support their colleagues, share best practice and look at ways in which we can improve knowledge around the business.

We invite experts and people with lived experience to give their insight into the challenges they face and how we can support our customers in similar situations. This has included Age UK, Kidney Care UK, an Aphasia charity (living with speech difficulties), Friends against scams, Stopping Loan Sharks, Cruse and Helen Pettifer, vulnerability expert.

Our annual Vulnerability Awareness week will continue to highlight issues which may affect not only our customers but our staff too and how we can support them in complex situations.



We focus on the quality of the interaction rather than speed of response to ensure our staff have time to spend with customers with complex needs



Providing an inclusive service

Some customers need a much more tailored service from us to meet their needs. To get this right we comply with best practice guidance from:

- the industry regulator, Ofwat
- the customer watchdog, CCW
- UK Regulators Network
- Office of the Public Guardian
- other industry regulators such as OFGEM, OFCOM, FCA
- Citizens Advice
- companies providing excellent customer service outside our industry.

We hold the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision and the Customer Service Excellence award to ensure we continue to provide the very best care for our customers.

We have engaged with and received endorsement from 53 organisations (local and national) who have reviewed the service we promise to offer now, and in the future, and allowed us to use their logos as a stamp of approval.

We have also received the Gold Award for two years running from Bristol Dementia Action Alliance as a proud dementia aware organisation, and are the first water company to obtain Partner status from Stop Loan Sharks.

Designing new and testing existing services with customers in mind

Stakeholders and partners, who represent customers who need extra help, have played a key role in the development of this strategy. They have helped co-create the services we offer to their specific client groups on Priority Services, evolve our financial support schemes, identify ways to raise awareness and increase take-up of our support and improve the effectiveness of our partnerships.

We have also engaged directly with customers through specific research and co-creation projects. For example, we've asked customers for ways we can improve Priority Services, to help us simplify the application process for our support schemes and understand their views on social tariffs and the level of cross-subsidy they are prepared to pay to support bill discounts for those on lower incomes.

More recently we have asked customers for their views on this strategy as a whole, including satisfaction with the support we're offering.

A summary of the specific research that has informed this strategy is in appendix I.

We also:

- understand the satisfaction of customers on Priority Services and drive continuous improvement through a combination of day-to-day tailored feedback surveys and detailed customer journey mapping, adopting different customer personas. See case study on page 52. We were delighted to have been quoted as best practice by CCW and Ofwat for this element of our complaints action plan
- look at the differences in the likelihood to complain or escalate a complaint between customers on Priority Services and others

- regularly seek the views of our expert Vulnerability Advisory Panel and more than 300 partners to continuously improve our offering for customers on Priority Services or in financial difficulty (see more information on our partners on pages 38 to 41).
- continue to comply with the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision (BS18477). It has been one of our performance commitments since 2015
- retained the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) quality mark since 1996
- regularly provide customer complaint satisfaction data to CCW, the consumer watchdog, so they can track our progress.

We plan to:

- undertake specific research with Priority Services customers, or specialist organisations representing them, to understand their expectations for complaint management and how these might differ. We will make changes, where necessary, to improve the journey for complainants
- better evaluate the impact on customer satisfaction when implementing new initiatives for those on Priority Services
- continue to share and explore best practice in the way we support customers who need extra help through our expert Vulnerability Advisory Panel, our partners, wider stakeholders including CCW, and companies inside and outside the sector
- explore the use of a lived experience panel when creating new services or testing existing services, either creating our own or drawing on other established panels.

Words most frequently used by our customers in survey comments

operator worked call lovely thank you garden
 solved impressed class team
 works fixed courteous supply
 promptly reporting fault cleared
 explained friendly check phone
 professional efficient finish
 pleasant repair arrived find
 sorted hours attended issue staff quick
 amazing tidy response
 experience happy people
 pleased leak service deal initial
 contact completed manhole clear
 involved engineer telephone hour
 problem easy workers
 drain helpful excellent
 answered nice engineers
 received informed young
 advice visit knowledgeable blocked dealt
 great brilliant property extremely
 company credit good communication
 efficiently morning
 fantastic quickly appreciated



Our ambitious commitments - to 2025

In 2018, when this strategy was first published, 86% of our customers told us that we 'treat them fairly' and 65% said that we 'care about our customers'.

In our business plan for 2020-2025 we set out these ambitious commitments and aims:

Our Commitments to 2025	Our performance - March 2024
More than double the number of customers on our social tariffs from 35,000 to 86,000. One in 15 households will receive a lower bill	59,572 customers on social tariffs 63,781 customers on wider TAP (tailored assistance programme) schemes
Receive at least 2,300 successful applications for TAP each year from our debt advice partners	2,732 successful applications*
Increase the numbers on our Priority Services Register from 8,500 in 2018 to over 90,000 by April 2025	113,763 households registered*
Contact customers on our Priority Services Register every two years to check their needs and details are up to date	Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2024 we attempted to contact 98.2% of customers on our register. The target was 90%. In the same period our actual contact was 58.5% against our target of 35%*
Continue to hold the British Standard for Inclusive Service (BS 18477)	Maintained*
Continue to hold the Customer Service Excellence award	Maintained* We comply with all 57 elements of the standard and have 22 compliance pluses up from 8 the previous year. Compliance plus means we exceeded the requirements of the standard against an element, demonstrated exceptional practice, or can be used as an exemplar for others within or beyond our sector.
Continue to fund a number of local community projects across our region through the Wessex Water Foundation aimed at improving access to services and building financial capability	Achieved*

Our Aims to 2025	Our performance - March 2024
Double awareness of our affordability support (tailored assistance programme) from 18% to 36%	Research shows that 48% of bill payers are aware
Double awareness of Priority Services from 16% to 32%	Research shows that 44% of bill payers are aware
Continue to hold the Louder than Words charter mark from the Royal Institute for the Deaf (RNID)	RNID no longer have their Louder than Words charter mark. However, we now have regular engagement with them and follow their best practice
Continue to hold the Keep me Posted best practice mark	Maintained
Continue to be a dementia friendly utility and for all current customer facing staff to be Dementia Friends	2,139 staff have become Dementia Friends
Comply with the Dementia Friendly Utilities Guide, in which we feature	Comply

*Monitoring success

We review this strategy regularly by monitoring the delivery of our commitments and initiatives and reporting our progress. More information can be found in our [Annual Performance Report and Annual review](#), which can be found on our website.

Our ambitious commitments - to 2030

We are better equipped than ever to identify, reach and support customers who need extra help. And the number is going to continue to grow meaning the pressure on our services will increase enormously. The value of our existing experience and proven programmes cannot be overstated.

Financial factors

Impacted by national and international factors, the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on everyone's lives placing enormous pressure on household finances particularly when many are still recovering from the impact of Covid.

In addition the significant but essential investment we have planned between 2025 and 2030 to deliver a highly ambitious set of outcomes, including tackling pollution, enhancing the water environment, and ensuring there is enough water to cater for everyone's needs over the long term will add increased pressure as water bills are regrettably going to rise.

In the latest Christians Against Poverty 'Under the rubble of debt and poverty report' published in May 2024, it shows that the average peak debt of new CAP client households in the South West of England in 2023 was £10,139 and the average number of debts was 13, with around 38% of those being a priority debt.

The headline statistics shows 59% of their clients are struggling below the poverty line, 60% are forced to borrow just to make ends meet, and a staggering 79% experience fear at the very sight of their mail.

The charity Scope report that 1 in 4 people in the UK are disabled and life costs them on average an extra £975 per month.

Closing the gap

Water must continue to be affordable for all. So, our goal is to eradicate water poverty across our region - no one will spend more than 5% of their disposable income on water by 2030. And for those in the most hardship who are least able to pay we will go even further.

At the end of March 2024 we had 63,781 customers on our affordability schemes. We predict that 140,000 will need help with their water bills by 2030.

Non-financial factors

In the UK the number of people with dementia or memory loss is set to rise to more than one million by 2025. By 2050 the number of people with sight loss is expected to double to over four million. The number of people in the UK over the age of 60 is expected to rise to over 20 million by 2030.

10.58 million people in the UK are estimated to be unpaid carers, which is one in five adults.

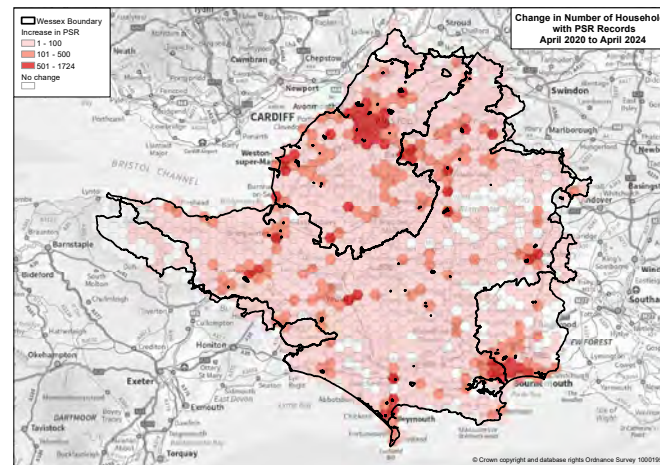
For all of the advances in healthcare, these numbers illustrate the scale of the issues that we face in the years to come.

Closing the gap

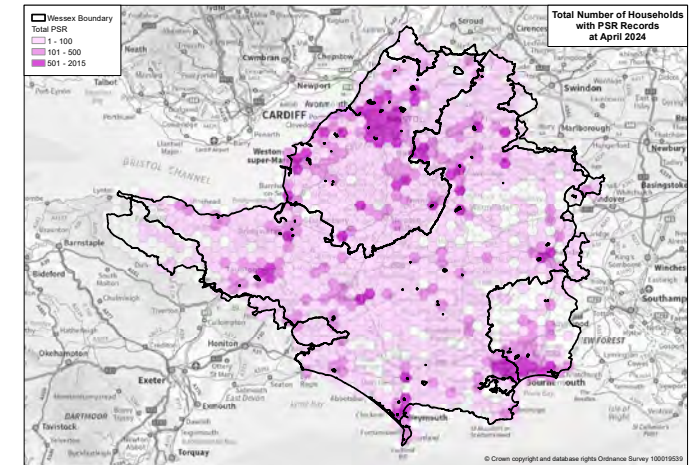
By March 2024 we had reached 113,763 on our Priority Services Register. Customers may need extra help for a variety of reasons and indeed some customers who have certain conditions are sufficiently supported by carers or their family and do not want extra help. Nevertheless we predict that 290,000 households will need Priority Services by 2030, an increase of 190%.

To help track trends and identify gaps in our Priority Service Register take up we produce data maps.

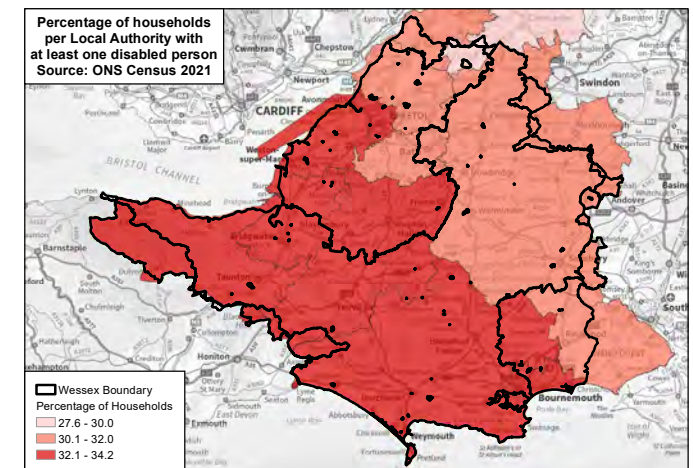
Here are a few examples. The first map shows the increase in total households on Priority Services from April 2020 to April 2024.

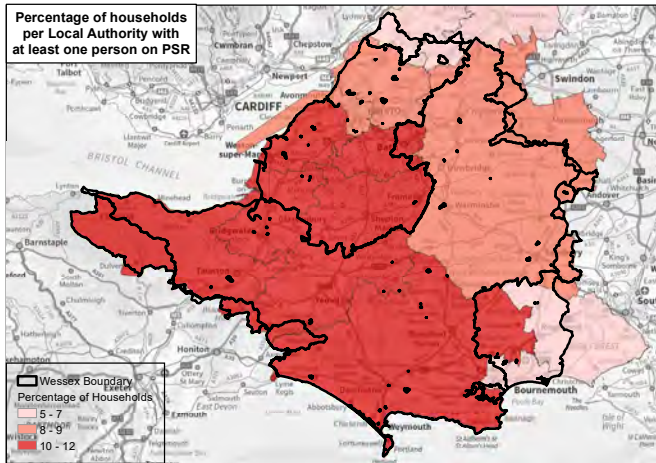


The second map shows total households on Priority Services up to April 2024.



We can look at data in more detail. For example using ONS Census 2021 data based on the local authorities we serve 17.5% of people in our region have a disability. We compare this to the number of households with at least one person on Priority Services and identify gaps at a high level.





Whilst this is indicative and helpful to compare and target, we are considering proposals from several organisations about how they might support us further in this area. Using demographic data sets we would like to produce a Priority Services index that identifies priority areas where additional help should be provided and highlights any gaps in current provision both now and into the future. We have asked them to include potential future challenges such as population growth, extreme weather, and an ageing population.

We set out our proposed approach to tackle water poverty and better support those who need extra help in our [Business Plan for 2025-2030](#).

Working with our Vulnerability Advisory Panel and taking account of customers' views, we have set out some specific commitments and aims for this strategy to 2030 on the right.

Our Commitments to 2030

- Increase the number of customers on our affordability schemes to around 140,000. No one will be in water poverty
- Increase the number of households on our Priority Services Register to around 290,000
- Contact customers on our Priority Services Register at least every two years to check their needs and details are up to date
- Help customers to save water and energy by fitting around 260,000 smart meters and providing water efficiency support

Our Aims to 2030

- Achieve a score of more than 85% when we ask Priority Services customers if they are satisfied with our service (initially we will track for operational contact with both billing contact and post-event surveys to follow)
- Achieve a score of more than 85% when we ask Priority Services customers if we met all their needs (initially we will track for operational contact with both billing and post-event surveys to follow)
- Continue to fund our debt advice partners and local community projects across our region to build financial capability and increase access to our services
- Achieve ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability
- Maintain our Customer Service Excellence award
- Increase awareness of Priority Services such as a different communication method or extra support during a supply interruption to over 65%
- Increase awareness of affordability support for customers who struggle to afford their water bill to over 65%
- Achieve a score of more than 85% when we ask partners if they are satisfied with our service
- Increase the number of data shares we have with organisations such as Councils
- Continue to be a dementia friendly utility with all customer facing staff Dementia Friends
- All customer-facing staff to become Friends Against Scams
- Adhere to the Keep Me Posted campaign
- Attempt to contact all customers on Priority Services who are affected during an incident to check if they need bottled water delivered or any additional support
- All customer facing staff to complete vulnerability iLearns
- Comply with WCAG 2.1 AA

In addition, we will make it as easy as possible for customers to apply for our services, auto-enrolling them onto support schemes where we can. We will also improve our communications with customers while we resolve their contact and during events, such as a break in the water supply. Our communications with those who need extra help will be more frequent and personalised using a range of channels including calls from our Customer Care Team.

Our Promises for customers who need extra help

Vulnerability comes in many forms and extra help might be needed for a short or long time. Some customers need extra help when dealing with us day-to-day, others need help with their bills and some need both.

So, we have designed and deliver flexible, tailored additional services to meet the widest possible range of customers' needs now and into the future through Priority Services and our Tailored Assistance Programme (TAP).

Our tailored service Promises include:

- Delivery of bottled water during a break in the water supply. We will call to check if this is needed and try to plan any breaks in the water supply around customers' medical needs. We will look at wider support if customers are out of water for any length of time.
- Communication and bills in a different format or language, that is jargon free and written in plain English.
- A variety of ways for customers to get in touch. These include our Live Chat service, dedicated language line, sign language translation and Text Relay.
- Additional meter readings and free relocation of the meter if needed.
- Knock and wait or password service if we visit a customer in their home.
- A carer, friend, family member or other nominated contact to liaise with us on a customer's behalf. We encourage our customers to set up a Power of Attorney where appropriate.
- Low-rate tariffs and schemes to reduce ongoing water bills and repay debt as well as practical advice around water and energy use. Our teams will signpost to these schemes at every opportunity.

Customers may need one or more of these services depending on their specific circumstances. And some groups of customers might need more specific extra help from us.

Although our support is tailored to the individual, we have used the insight from our stakeholders and partners to illustrate on the following pages the extra help we might typically give to certain customer groups and actions we will take to best support them. We absolutely recognise customers may fall into more than one group and may need more or less extra help from us.



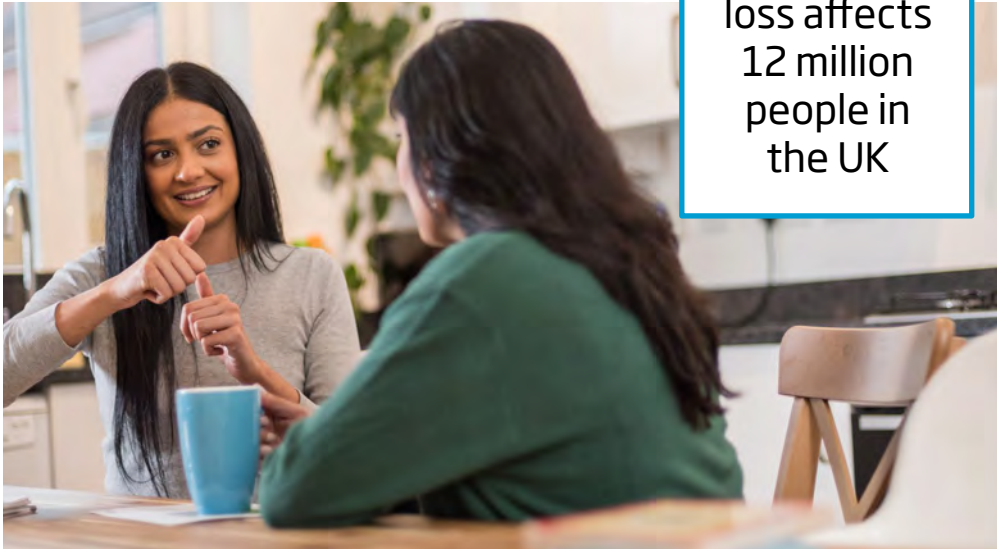
Hearing impairment/deafness

Hearing loss affects 12 million people in the UK - that's one in five adults who are either deaf or have some form of hearing loss.


Research shows that more than 70% of people who use hearing aids would choose a company with staff who are deaf aware over a company whose staff are not.

We promise to:

- ensure our customer facing staff have deaf awareness training
- ensure the communications we use during an emergency are tailored for deaf/hearing impaired customers
- ensure our customer help videos are subtitled
- give staff access to sign language apps
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of the customer
- be aware that customers may have information about themselves within their home to share with us when we visit (perhaps a card by their front door)
- offer hard of hearing customers who wish to use our password scheme the means to do so either through a written password or other communication arrangements.



Hearing loss affects 12 million people in the UK



We must understand the challenges people with dementia face

Dementia/cognitive impairment

There are 900,000 people with dementia in the UK; 42,000 of those are aged under 65. There are estimated to be over 670,000 people in the UK acting as primary carers for people with dementia.

We promise to:

- ensure that all customer facing staff are trained to be a Dementia Friend and have an awareness of dementia
- ensure that all our sites with public access are dementia friendly and have dementia friendly signs
- be aware that customers may have information about themselves within their home to share with us when we visit (perhaps a card by their front door)
- continue as an active partner, supporting local networks and attending relevant best practice sharing events
- take part in the national dementia action awareness week each year
- encourage and support our partners when it comes to best practice in this area.

Mental health

One in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year. Mental health can affect anyone from any background at any time and ranges from everyday life worries to severe depression.

We promise to:

- work with mental health charities to ensure that our staff are provided with up-to-date training on mental health, non-judgemental listening and use of appropriate language
- recognise when to signpost customers to other organisations
- know the right questions to ask to encourage disclosure and provide support for the customer if required
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of the customer
- continue as an active partner, supporting local networks and attending relevant best practice sharing events
- train staff, through our wellbeing group, to become mental health first aiders to support their colleagues or friends and family
- support national mental health awareness week each year
- provide training for all our customer facing staff on mental health awareness.

By understanding and recognising mental health problems we can ensure that both staff and customers are better supported



See our case study on page 49

Dialysis

For some types of renal patients, the water and electricity supply is critical to their dialysis treatment. Because unpredictable weather is commonplace in the UK, we urge all kidney patients to act on this to ensure their life is not put at risk.

It is essential that they notify us of their status as a renal patient so we can act quickly in the event of a water supply interruption and other unexpected events.

We promise to:

- call the customer during a water supply event and keep them updated (including via text) until the supply is fully restored
- deliver free bottled water in emergencies or planned work
- quickly check the quality of our supply after an interruption event to ensure that it is safe to use for dialysis again
- work closely with the NHS to support our customers on dialysis
- work in partnership with Kidney Care UK to reach more customers who may need to be on our Priority Services Register or WaterSure scheme.

Blind or partially sighted

More than two million people are estimated to be living with sight loss in the UK today. This sight loss is severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives. It affects people of all ages but especially older people: one in five people aged 75 and one in two aged 90 and over are currently living with sight loss.

There is also a link between sight loss and reduced wellbeing. People with sight loss are three times more likely to suffer from depression.

We promise to:

- arrange for water supply interruption notices to be given via telephone or text message
- provide bills and a selection of our leaflets in large print, or braille
- read the meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer
- take the needs of the blind/partially sighted into account when we are working in the street.



More than
two million people
are estimated to
be living with sight
loss in the UK
today

Pensionable age

More than 15.5 million people are aged 60 or over in the UK, making up 23% of the population. There are now 3.2 million people aged 80 or over, and almost 600,000 of these are aged 90 or over.

In our region, more than a third of the population are aged 60 and above. Although ageing isn't an illness, some may find later life more challenging.

We promise to:

- read the meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer, or look at moving it to a more accessible location
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues
- offer to redirect bills to a carer or family member or friend, if the customer is in hospital, living in residential care or staying with relatives for a long period
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of customers
- withdraw the water and/or sewerage charges if an unmetered property is unoccupied but furnished while a customer is in hospital, living in residential care or staying with relatives for a long period
- work with Age UK to provide training for staff on how to support customers of pensionable age.

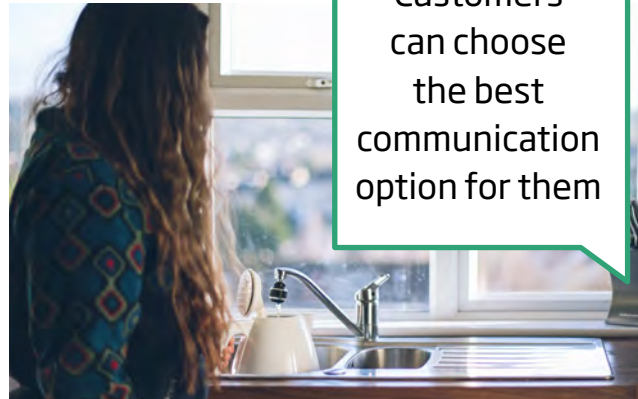
Physical impairment

Over 18% of the UK population have a limiting long term illness, impairment, or disability. The most reported impairments are those that affect mobility, lifting or carrying.

We promise to:

- read the water meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer, or look at moving it to a more accessible location
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues
- ensure that all our sites with public access are wheelchair friendly

We can read the water meter up to four times a year



Customers can choose the best communication option for them

Developmental conditions

Conditions include, but are not limited to, some autism spectrum conditions, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy and spina bifida.

This may affect a person's ability to communicate, interact with other people and cope with change and uncertainty.

We promise to:

- offer a range of communication options for our customers - while we have online forms, Live Chat and email, customers can choose the best communication option for them
- if we speak to a customer with a developmental condition on the phone, we will check understanding and offer a follow up email to set out what has been agreed
- offer to redirect bills to a carer or family member
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of the customer
- ensure our leaflets and other communication methods are jargon free and written in plain English
- speak in a clear, literal way, avoiding jargon and checking understanding
- plan with the customer what they should do if something goes wrong or if there is an emergency.

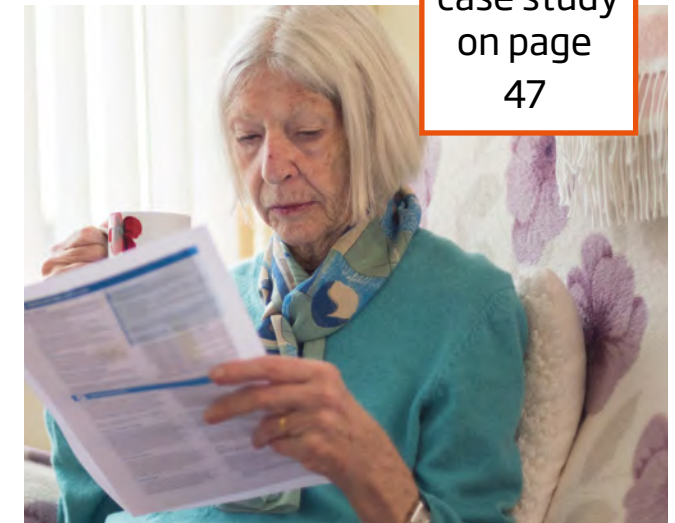
Unable to communicate in English/literacy difficulties

We recognise and understand that there are many different languages spoken by customers in our region. Also 7.1 million people in England can be described as having 'very poor literacy skills'.

We promise to:

- provide bills and a selection of our leaflets in a preferred language
- offer an interpretation service at our customer service centres
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of a customer
- use Google Translate when visiting people in their homes
- ensure our leaflets and other communication methods are jargon free and in plain English
- work with third party organisations such as Scope to make sure bills are easy to read and understand (see our case study on page 46).

See our case study on page 47



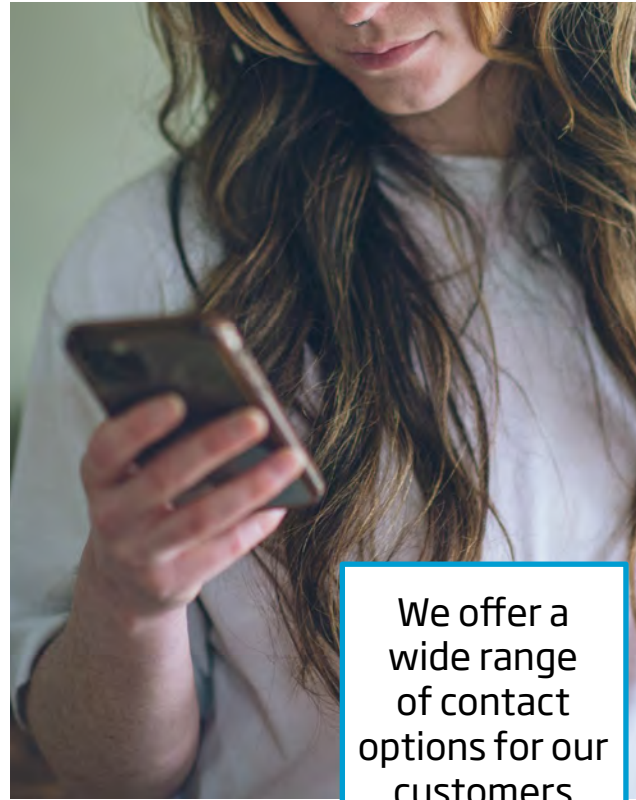
Chronic/serious illness

We are here to support our customers who have short and long-term or terminal illness and understand that this can be a difficult time.

We promise to:

- read the meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer
- offer to redirect bills to a carer, family member or friend, if the customer is in hospital, living in residential care or staying with relatives for a long period. We can also withdraw the water and/or sewerage charges if an unmetered property is unoccupied but furnished
- provide help with bills and debt if required
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues.

We can deliver free bottled water during emergencies if a customer has mobility issues



We offer a wide range of contact options for our customers

Speech Impairment

Around 2.5 million in the UK have a speech or language difficulty, either due to an illness, disease, or developmental condition, so we understand that not everyone has the ability or confidence to communicate with us over the phone.

We are committed to ensuring we offer a wide range of channels so our customers can contact us easily.

We promise to:

- make our services accessible via many different channels including Live Chat, email, letter, social media and Relay UK text service
- offer to speak to a nominated contact on behalf of the customer.

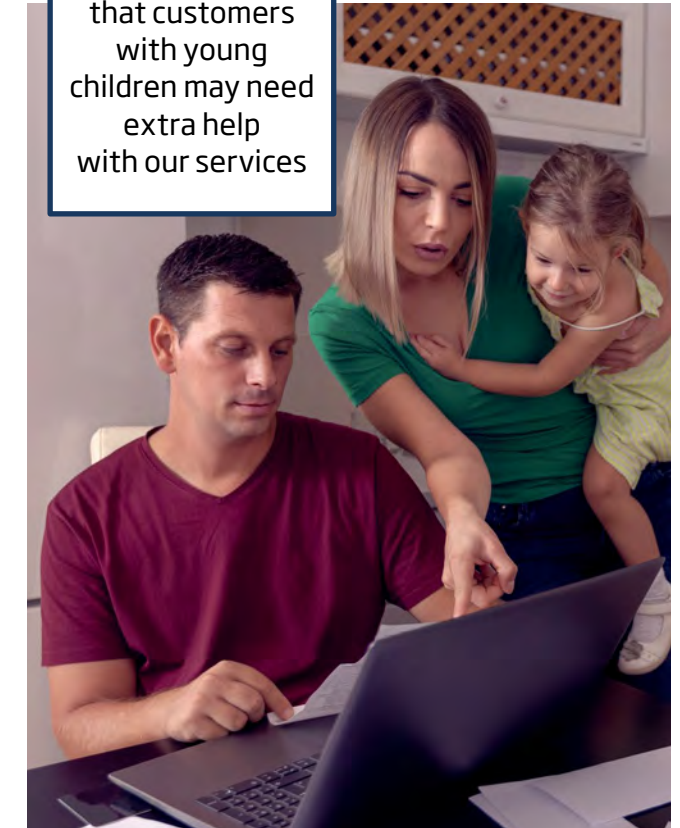
Families with children under 5

With babies and young children in the house, being without water can bring a whole new set of challenges, and on a daily basis many need extra help with our services.

We promise to:

- call the customer during an event such as a planned or unplanned break in the water supply or a problem with water quality
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work.

We understand that customers with young children may need extra help with our services



Medical equipment

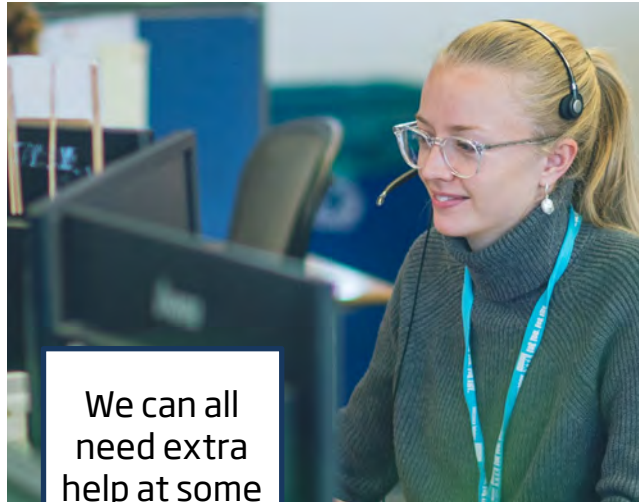
If the customer needs to use medical equipment such as a nebuliser, sleep apnoea monitor, heart or lung ventilator, oxygen concentrator, stair lift, hoist, electric bed, medicine refrigeration or careline/telecare system they may need extra help including during an emergency.

We promise to:

- consider the time of day and if this changes our priority with our customers
- wait if the customer takes a little longer to come to the door under our knock and wait service
- read the meter up to four times a year, on request of the customer
- offer to redirect bills to a carer, family member or friend, if required. We can also withdraw the water and/or sewerage charges if an unmetered property is unoccupied but furnished
- provide help with bills and debt if required
- give advice on water and energy saving
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues.



We can give advice on water and energy saving



We can all need extra help at some point

Temporary support

We know that we can all need extra help at some point in our lives and this isn't always permanent. Age, bereavement, divorce, redundancy, or post hospital recovery can all impact everyday situations.

We promise to:

- ensure it's easy to notify us and provide the relevant information quickly and efficiently
- promote Tell Us Once services which will help lighten the load
- provide a dedicated online form for a simple way of notifying us of a customer passing away at a time that suits them
- offer a variety of channels to make it easy and accessible to get in touch with us
- be aware of the impact on the customer and treat them sensitively
- make the customer aware they will be supported temporarily and check in with them after a year to see if they still require our support or have more additional needs.

Medically dependant showering or bathing/ water dependant

Customers who are medically dependant on showering or bathing need water every day or multiple times a day. This includes skin conditions or degenerative diseases. Any prolonged break in the water supply would put them at significant risk.

A customer who is water dependant is our highest priority during an incident.

We promise to:

- call the customer during a water supply event and keep them updated (including via text) until the supply is fully restored
- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work
- wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door under our knock and wait service.

Water dependant customers are our highest priority during an incident



Additional presence preferred

Some customers do not find being in the presence of a stranger comfortable or possible due to either lived experience such as abuse, crime, or religious requirements. This may result in anxiety and potential risk to all parties involved.

It's always important that the customer feels safe

We promise to:

- proactively contact the customer to notify we will visit to allow them to arrange for an additional person to be present
- offer a personal password in the customer's chosen format which we will use every time we visit to help guard against bogus callers
- ensure that all our staff carry an identification card that displays their name, photograph, our logo, and a telephone number to call to check staff's identity
- wait if the customer would like to verify our staff or contact a trusted person to do this on their behalf.



Unable to answer the door

Due to age, a disability or ill health a customer may not be able to answer the door to staff if we need to visit their property. This might be temporary or long-term if their health is deteriorating.

We promise to:

- deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work
- offer to speak to a person of the customer's choice instead of the customer to gain access where appropriate
- consider a tailored text service for planned/ unplanned breaks in the water supply
- read the water meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer, or look at moving it to a more accessible location.

Restricted hand movement

This can include conditions such as arthritis, brittle bones or injury and it could be a temporary condition or degenerative change which could get worse with time.

We promise to:

- offer to relocate the meter for free if the customer is having difficulty reading it
- consider free bottled water delivery if they are unable to collect from alternative water supplies during emergencies.

Poor sense of taste/smell

A medical loss of smell or taste may affect a customer more acutely during a water quality incident. It could impact their safety if they are unable to sense there is a problem with their water quality.

We promise to:

- prioritise the customer during water quality incidents
- engage with them by telephone
- carry out a water quality check whenever they request one.

Supporting our rural communities

Customers living in rural areas can suffer from what is known as rural vulnerability, due to a combination of poor transport links, lack of broadband, low wages and higher than average house prices.

We promise to:

- continue to be a member of the Rural Services Partnership and Rural England
- support rural projects through the Wessex Water Foundation to improve access to services
- review rural research to ensure we are learning from the findings
- ensure all customers have multiple easy ways to pay their bills.

Protecting against bogus callers

Raising awareness of bogus callers and the crimes they commit is something that is important to us. We have put several procedures in place for our staff to follow.

We promise to:

- wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door under our knock and wait service
- offer a personal password in the format of choice which we will use every time we visit to help guard against bogus callers
- offer hard of hearing customers who wish to use the password scheme the means to do so either through a written password or other communication arrangements set up for their specific use
- ensure that every member of staff carries a photo ID card
- wait if the customer would like to verify our staff or contact a trusted person to do this on their behalf
- be part of the local distraction burglary network in the local area
- follow the UK Water Industry Distraction Burglary Protocol
- offer Friends Against Scams training to all customer facing staff
- investigate if a customer thinks there has been a scam and report to the National Cyber Security Centre
- provide videos explaining how to spot scams and identify genuine callers
- provide information on our website about scams and fraud.

We offer a personal password which we will use every time we visit



Concerns about the welfare of customers

In exceptional circumstances, we might have concerns over the welfare of a customer. We have strong links with local authorities, environmental health teams and emergency services so in emergency situations we may ask for assistance from other agencies.

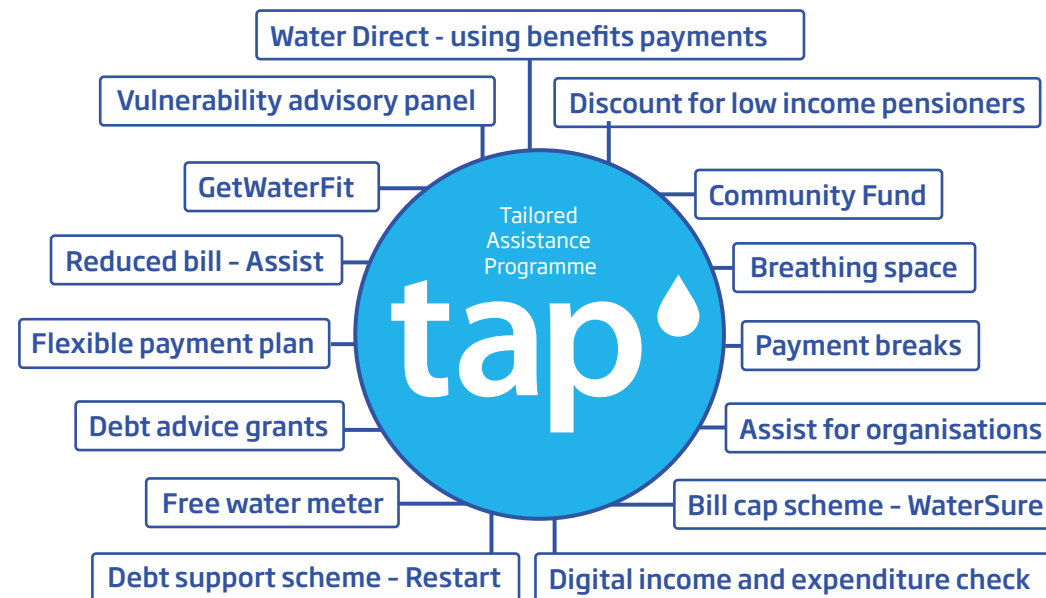
Help with water bills

Our tailored assistance programme, TAP, is one of the most extensive, innovative, and mature affordability support programmes across the water industry.

Through this award-winning programme, we offer a range of schemes and low-rate tariffs to help customers afford their ongoing water charges and repay their debts along with practical help to reduce water and energy bills.

In 2022 we agreed to have common naming conventions for schemes across the water industry which we have adopted.

- **Reduced bill – Assist** – our first main social tariff and the first in the water industry. Assist has six bands, and the customer is placed on the band closest to their ability to pay following debt advice.
- **Bill cap scheme – WaterSure** – an enhanced scheme that reduces the annual bill to bring it in line with the average metered bill rather than the average domestic bill.
- **Discount for low income pensioners** – offering the ‘just about managing’ 20% (or around £55) off their bills.
- **Assist for organisations** – enables not for profit organisations to pass bill discounts on to young adults who need extra help.
- **Covid Assist** – temporary support for those struggling financially due to Covid-19 who can get back on track after a short period. This was superseded by changes made to Assist in 2022 as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.
- **Reduced bill – Fast Track Assist** – in response to the ‘cost of living’ crisis, our Assist process was streamlined to passport customers on to the tariff with a 50% bill reduction before debt advice was received.
- **Debt support scheme – Restart** – if the customer has significant water debt they can’t repay, we offer our debt support plan Restart.
- **Payment breaks or flexible payment plans** – offers customers longer to pay or more time to deal with a change in circumstances, or for short term in problems paying.
- **Water Direct – using benefit payments** – if the customer is behind with their water bill to pay directly to us.
- **Water metering and Home Check** – helping customers reduce water and energy use and backed up by our industry first cash back guarantee designed by our Young People’s Panel.
- **Co-delivery of TAP** – through partnerships. More detail on the success of TAP can be found in Appendix II.



We promise to:

- make sure water bills are affordable for all – no one should be unable to afford their water bill
- offer a range of lower-rate tariffs, debt support schemes and flexible ways to pay
- provide customers with a tailored solution that meets their individual financial circumstances
- continue to evolve this programme so that it meets the needs of our customers on the lowest incomes now and into the future.

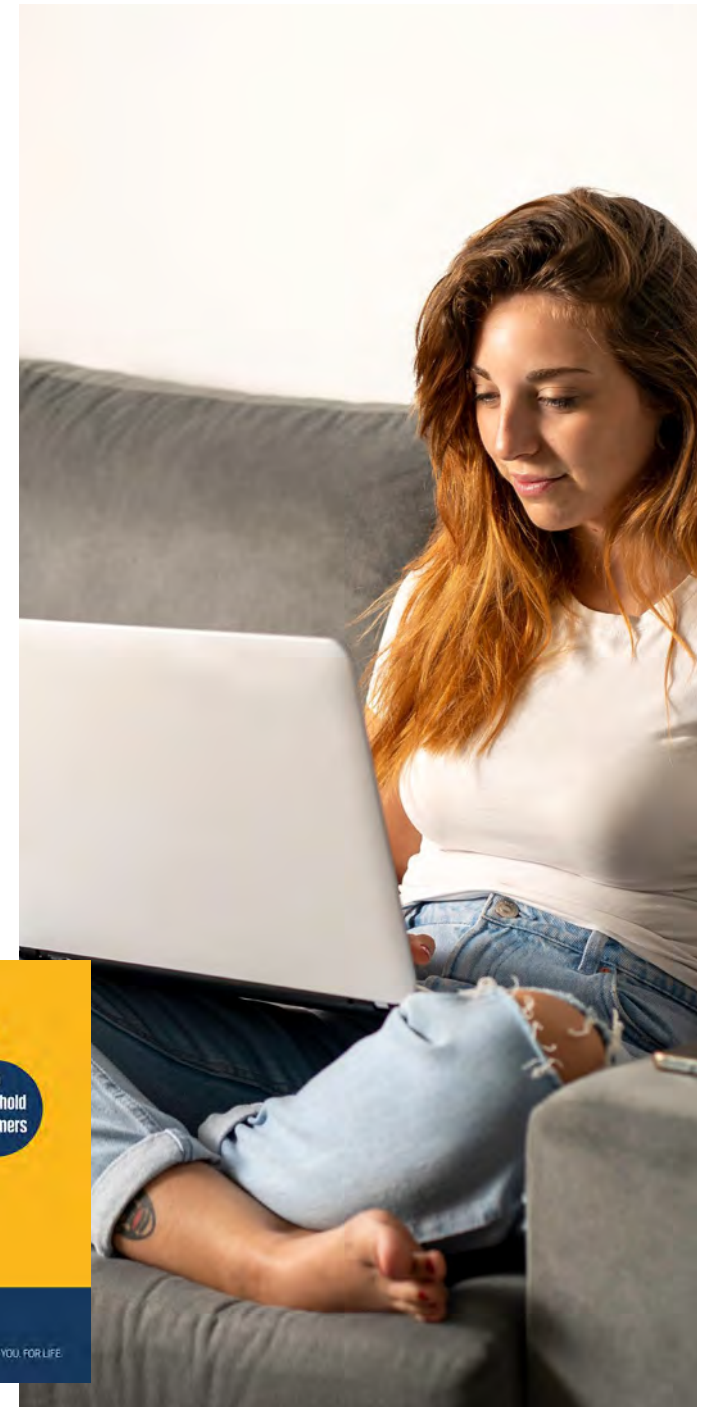
Compensation

We aim to provide all our customers with the very highest levels of service. The Wessex Promise goes above and beyond for all our customers, and if we fail they are entitled to compensation. This includes promises around alternative supplies of water during a supply interruption, working in the street, and responding to customer contact. We have additional compensation that customers can claim if they are on Priority Services.

Priority Services		Compensation if we fail to keep our Promise
Registering	We will register you for Priority Services within five working days when you contact us.	£25
Our commitments	We'll compensate you if you have asked us to do the following and we don't: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • send you a bill in a particular format, eg, braille, large print or other languages • communicate with you in your preferred way • send an item of literature in the format you choose. 	£25
Extra meter readings	Customers with additional needs and the elderly can ask for up to a maximum of two extra meter readings each year. We'll take the readings within five working days of your request.	£25

We offer a free leak repair service for our customers which has certain eligibility criteria. If we detect a leak on a customer's supply pipe and it is out of scope of our free repair policy, we will still fix it for free if they are unable to arrange the repair themselves due to a vulnerability or they are on one of our financial support schemes.

We always signpost our customers to Watersafe or Drainsafe if they need a trusted plumber or drainage contractor to help them repair a problem at their property.



Click here for our [Our promise leaflet](#) >

Incident management

When a customer signs up for Priority Services, we can better understand the extra help they need. Some customers need more than others if, for example, there is a break in their water supply.

As we share data with energy companies, we have agreed the following priority ratings that we will use during an interruption or wider incident:

- **Priority 1** – Customers who need extra help and are most at risk if they have a supply interruption, an issue with their supply, or if they need to evacuate their property.
- **Priority 2** – Customers who may require extra help when we visit or have contact with them. It is likely they will have a nominated contact to liaise with us on their behalf.

Priority 1
Dialysis- feeding pump and automated feed
Poor sense of smell/ taste
Water dependent

Priority 2
Unable to answer the door
Cognitive impairment- inc Dementia
Nebuliser and apnoea monitor
Heart/ lung ventilator
Oxygen Concentrator
Stair lift/hoist/ electric bed
Physical Impairment
Developmental condition
Mental Health
Temp- post hospital
Chronic serious illness
Oxygen use
Restricted hand movement
Blind

- **Priority 3** – Customers who need some considerations on how we will communicate with them, and the support needed when visiting.
- **Priority 4** – Customers who are impacted the least during an event.

If an unexpected incident occurs our Customer Care Team will contact all customers on Priority Services to let them know, find out what extra help they might need, and continue to keep in touch with them throughout the incident. Priority 1 customers are contacted first and as quickly as possible followed by Priority 2 and 3 who have communication needs. If an interruption happens overnight, Priority 1 customers will receive a text message.

Priority 3
Partially sighted
Medically dependent- showering/ bathing
Careline/ telecare
Hearing Impairment

Priority 4
Pensionable age
Unable to communicate in English
Medicine refrigeration
Families with children under 5
Additional presence preferred
Speech impairment
Temporary- Life change
Temporary- young adult

We have a dedicated page on our website telling customers how we'll support them during a water supply incident. It includes essential information such as how we will keep them updated, their bottled water rights and

entitlement to compensation if an unexpected incident was to occur. We also explain how we'll support our customers if they experience sewer flooding. Find out more about [how we manage incidents](#) on our website.

Warm welcome

Once registered for Priority Services, a customer will receive a welcome letter to confirm we have added them to our register.

We let them know what is included in our free Priority Services and that we will:

- give extra support during an emergency such as a break in the water supply including details of our incidents web page
- get in touch with them using their chosen method of communication or through their nominated contact
- wait for them to answer the door if they need a little more time if we need to visit their property.

We also tell them:

- our contact details if they ever need to speak to us about their bill or have an emergency
- what to do if their situation changes
- that we will contact them every two years to check their information is up to date
- that we may share their information with other organisations and how to opt out if they don't want us to
- how to get help with their bills and debt
- about free home safety visits offered by their local fire service.

We are reviewing our welcome letters with Scope to make sure they contain the right amount of detail and are easy to read.

Check in

We need to make sure our customers' details are up to date so we can fully support them. If we haven't heard from a customer within two years or received an update via one of our data share partners, we will check in with them at least twice.

Working together

We are proud that so many charities, authorities and other organisations have reviewed our services - in some cases helped us to design them - and given us permission to display their logo by way of endorsement.



Four workstreams to proactively raise awareness and uptake

It's critical that we maximise awareness and increase uptake of the extra help we can provide.

In 2013, working with our Vulnerability Advisory Panel, we set up four workstreams to help us meet this goal. In this section we describe what has been achieved to date, and our plans for expanding and evolving these workstreams.

1 Using data wisely

This helps us assess the effectiveness and uptake of our support and identify and target activity proactively and effectively

2 Growing partnerships

This workstream is designed to increase the number and variety of our partners and to work with them in a way that suits them to best engage with their clients, who are our customers

3 Community engagement

To extend our reach and engagement across communities to break down barriers to engagement and reach those who might otherwise not have been heard

4 Improving the customer experience

To make it as easy as possible for customers to know about and access our support through the channel of their choice and to have an excellent customer experience

Growing partnerships

Co-creating initiatives with our partners

Problems paying
Do you have clients who struggle to pay their water bills or who are in water debt?

citizens advice
Bath & North East Somerset
East Bristol foodbank
NATIONAL DEBTLINE

Wessex Water's PartnerHub
Helping you to support customers throughout our region.

Welcome to Wessex Water's Partner Hub

Community engagement

Blue Monday roadshow - Bristol

Helping with the Salvation Army toy appeal

Strategy for customers who need extra help

Using data wisely

Collecting and using data to focus help where it's needed most

Extra support during power cuts or water supply interruptions
Register for Priority Services

Sharing data with other utility suppliers so customers only tell us once

Priority Services registration form

Map showing data points and bar charts across the region.

Improving customer experience

Mapping the customer journey

Supporting customers who need extra help

Helping our staff to understand the effects of dementia

Maintaining the highest standards of customer care

StepChange Great Charity HOT KEY

Priority Services
Extra support when you need it

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE
CSE

To maximise the effectiveness and relevance of our four workstreams, we've engaged directly with customers who need extra help and many partner organisations. This ensures they play an active role in the creation and delivery of services. More information about the development of our strategy is in Appendix II.

Our initiatives

On the following pages we set out the initiatives we have delivered to date and what we're planning to deliver in the future. We have mapped each initiative to the principals or objectives set out in Ofwat's Service for all and Paying fair guidance. Find out more about [Ofwat's guidelines](#) on their website.

Service for all and Paying Fair key

Service for all

- 1 High standard of service and support
- 2 Inclusive by 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 is 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

* this is not applicable to us





























Workstream	Examples of Wessex Water initiatives from 2013 to March 2024	Service for all	Paying fair
Using data wisely	Targeted activity We carried out regular econometric analysis using indices of multiple deprivation. This helped us understand our social tariff uptake relative to deprivation on a geographical basis. We shared this data regularly with our debt advice partners to understand best practice, drive improvements in partner performance, target areas of focus and identify where best to fund outreach services.		1 2 4 6
	Joint working Teaming up with National Grid (previously Western Power Distribution), the Centre for Sustainable Energy, Wellington Medical Centre, and Taunton Deane Borough Council we supported households suffering the health impacts of a cold home and encouraged take-up of TAP and Priority Services.	3	1
	Joint mailshot Our joint mailshots with StepChange promoted their annual debt advice campaigns. We also targeted their previous clients with information on TAP. Our joint mailshot with Wiltshire Council helped us spread the word about TAP in the most deprived parts of Wiltshire.		2
	Discount for low income pensioners (originally Pension Credit discount) We identified customers in areas of high deprivation whose date of birth made them of pensionable age. We then mailed them to promote our bill discount.		4
	Early warning indicators Developed a series of indicators to measure the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on payment behaviour and affordability.		4
	Full use of data sharing We make it as easy and quick as possible for customers to receive the support we offer by using data to automatically apply bill reductions to customers or add customers to our PSR where we can without the need to complete an application. Making full use of data sharing (based on the Digital Economy Act) and data mapping with the Department of Work and Pensions, Local Councils, Fire Service and Energy Distributors.	1 3 4	4

Workstream	Examples of Wessex Water initiatives from 2013 to March 2024	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Growing Partnerships	Joint publicity We worked with our many partners - housing associations, job centres, children's centres, food banks, care centres and credit unions to name a few - providing free, bespoke posters, flyers, editorials, website articles, e-bulletins, and banners for joint publicity campaigns. We also advertise local fire services home safety fire visits within our Priority Services leaflets and on our website.	3	
	Bespoke guide We created a bespoke guide for our partners so that they could signpost and refer people to our services.	3	
	Incentivising applications to TAP We funded a multitude of debt advice partners since 2005 to refer their clients to TAP, totalling more than £5 million. We worked with national Citizens Advice to introduce a funding model that incentivises agencies to improve the quality and increase the number of applications.		
	Funding to engage the hard to reach We provided funding for 27 projects, typically outreach services, to reach the hard-to-reach in our most deprived areas.		
	Funding to improve financial capability We provided funding for 52 projects to improve the financial capability and budgeting skills of our customers particularly those who are younger or managing a household budget for the first time such as care and prison leavers.		
	Easy applications We developed an online tailored assistance programme (TAP) application form for debt advice agencies to apply on behalf of their clients. The service has a secure log on and stop/start functionality.		
	Registering once We collaborated with National Grid (previously Western Power Distribution) and Scottish and Southern Electricity Network (SSEN) to signpost and promote two-way Priority Services online and in other communications.		
	Accredited agency We developed an accredited agency scheme with our debt advice partners allowing fast track applications and additional funding for those submitting the highest quality applications to TAP.		
	Joint projects To raise awareness of Priority Services, we worked with National Grid and Bristol Water to advertise on pharmacy bags handed out to customers in our mutual area.	3	
	In-home emergency service We explored partnerships with 'red pull cord' providers with the aim of offering a single in-home emergency service for our Priority Services customers.	3	
Community project funding In 2022-23 we put around £550,000 into the Wessex Water Foundation for debt advice and community projects. See page 30 for more information.			

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Examples of Wessex Water initiatives from 2013 to March 2024	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Growing Partnerships (continued)	Increased partner network We introduced a new partnership scheme with three tiers of partnership. This will enable us to improve our engagement with more tailored updates. It also gives partners an opportunity to officially say they are a Wessex Water partner.	3	1 2 4 6
	Promotional resources We worked with foodbanks to print affordability messages on food bags.	3	1 2
	Improved PartnerHub We evolved our innovative PartnerHub based on user feedback with the objective of increasing the number of partners using it and maximising the opportunities for joint working and self-service. This will also include a quarterly update to all our partners and stakeholders via our e-newsletter PartnerHub Post.	3	1 2 4 6
Community Engagement	Advice networks We continued to be an active member of a variety of advice networks across our region attending meetings, giving talks at events and maximising opportunities for joint working. These include Wiltshire Money, Connecting Advice in Dorset (CAiD), Help and advice across Somerset (HAAS), Somerset Advice Network, Advice UK, Advice centres for Avon (ACFA), Advice North Somerset, Village Agents, Food clubs.	1 2 3	1 2 4 6
	Stakeholder events We attended public and stakeholder events with and without partners to encourage sign up to our social tariffs, water meters and Priority Services and to promote water-saving advice. Examples include Blue Monday in the Galleries in Bristol, a big energy saving week event in Swanage, Avon Fire Community event in Bristol, Wiltshire Money forum and the Dementia Action Alliance street party. More recently in 2022 we attended many customer face to face cost of living events.	2 3	1 2
	Primary Times We raised awareness of our support schemes and affordability tariffs with parents of primary school age children by advertising in the Primary Times magazine.	3	1 2
	Customer case study We filmed and recorded an affordability case study to help promote financial support. See page 49 for further information on this.		1
	Accessible sites Making our reservoir sites more accessible. See case study on page 48.	1 2	
	Community Connectors The initial two year pilot in Bridport and Chippenham is now complete and the success of these will be rolled out across our region with two new community outreach coordinators	3	1
Improving the customer experience	Breaking down barriers We have optimised the content, messaging and language on our bills, debt recovery stationery, leaflets, correspondence, and website. Adding success stories, clarifying the benefits of debt advice, and giving simple debt advice pointers has helped us break down any barriers to engagement with customers who are often reluctant to seek our help. We also worked with Quids in! - a social publication - to develop clear calls for action.	2	1 2 5

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Examples of Wessex Water initiatives from 2013 to March 2024	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Improving the customer experience (continued)	Simple application form We improved and simplified our online tailored assistance programme (TAP) application form.		
	Specialist training We asked Money Advice Trust, Mind and Samaritans to provide specialist training for our staff so they can better spot signs of financial difficulty or abuse, mental health, and potential crisis situations. We then published a mental health video and launched an associated eLearning module on mental health for all staff.	 	 
	Going the extra mile (GEM) All our customer facing staff received bespoke, full day specialist training on how to go the extra mile for customers. Staff continue to receive refresher training and we are continuing to train all new staff through a GEM induction programme.	 	 
	Dementia friendly We pledged to become a dementia friendly business by the end of 2020. Now we have achieved this, we continue to train all new starters as Dementia Friends when they join the business. We played an active role in developing the Dementia Friendly Utilities Guide (in which Wessex Water features). We have put in place our Dementia Alliance Action Plan.	 	    
	Help with your bills We created an animated video - 'Help with your bills' which was used on YouTube, our website and in the waiting rooms of our partners.		
	Warm voices By implementing a warm voice direct transfer to StepChange from our own call centre and credit departments we made it easier for those unable to visit a debt advice organisation to receive advice over the phone.		   
	Easy sign-up We made it much easier for customers to sign up for our debt repayment scheme, Restart, over the phone. And digital sign-up on the doorstep for WaterSure Plus enabled customers to provide photographic evidence of benefits there and then. In 2022 we reviewed the annual renewal process of Watersure by removing the need to provide evidence every year and providing an online form for a more convenient way for customers to let us know they are still eligible.		 
	Vulnerability roadshows Our in-house vulnerability roadshows with customer facing staff raised awareness and proactive sign-up to Priority Services along with ideas for improvement to the customer journey.	 	
	Vulnerability Experts We introduced Vulnerability Experts across all customer facing areas of our business who serve as a point of contact for their business area to provide specialist advice and guidance on how our staff can support customers who need extra help.	 	

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Examples of Wessex Water initiatives from 2013 to March 2024	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Improving the customer experience (continued)	Biannual Check in Introduced contacting customers who are on our Priority services register every two years to check their needs and details are up to date.	4	
	Warm Welcome Introduced a warm welcome to Priority Services for the customers who register.	1	
	Scope bill review The disability charity reviewed our water bill to improve accessibility and ease for our customers. A further review will be done with stakeholders with a disability. Our case study on page 47 explains more.	1 2	1 2 5
	Winter Ready Home Visits In Winter 2021 we offered a selection of our Priority Services customers visits to help prepare their home for cold weather and avoid any unnecessary leaks.	1	
	Royal association for the Deaf (RAD) Working jointly with RAD, National Grid, SSEN and Bristol Water in order to reach our hard of hearing and deaf customers by promoting PSR and affordability. We have also introduced a deaf awareness iLearn to the business.	1 2 3	1 2
	Affordability review pilot CCW conducted an independent review, on behalf of Defra and Welsh Government, of the current financial support for water customers and made 10 recommendations on how to improve the help available for those who may struggle to pay their water and sewerage bills. A number of pilot projects were launched to explore the recommendations in more detail. We led a pilot to co-design a simple application process that covers all support schemes.		1 2 4 5 7
	Eligibility calculator We developed a tool for our website which will identify what schemes and tariffs our customers may be eligible for so they can self-serve.		1
	Online form review Produced new online forms that are much more dynamic in a 'tell us once' approach.	2	1
	Website accessibility We have undertaken an accessibility audit improvements have been made to become fully WCAG 2.1 AA compliant.	2	
	Independent advice We updated our independent advice web page to include a range of organisations that support customers who need extra help.	1	2
Economic abuse Signed up to principles of economic abuse for the water sector.	1	2	

* See key on page 26

Using data wisely



- Looking into using Fintech tools
- Increase data shares with councils and fire services
- Be a member of the steering group for Northumbrian support for all hub pilots /National data share workstreams
- Continue to explore a single social tariff
- Consider innovative tariffs for disabled customers
- We will explore opportunities to auto-enrol certain groups of customers to social tariffs - care leavers, those with mental ill health, terminal illness, parent carers, those with a disability or medical condition

Growing partnerships



- Run a project with Kidney Care UK
- Exploring referral partnerships with debt advice agencies
- Developing partnership tiers with partners
- Run two debt advice workshops for funded partners
- Put £265k into the Wessex Water Fund for debt advice and the Community Fund
- Continue memberships in Money Advice Liaison Group, Rural Services Partnership, Rural England, Disability Rights UK, Collaboration Network
- Regular updates to funded partners and Vulnerability Advisory Panel
- Obtain Partner status with Stop Loan Sharks
- Worked with partners such as Scope, RNIB, Money and Mental Health and Ovo on vulnerability support
- Develop partnership through Resource West to collaborate with other water companies and energy providers

Community engagement



- Assisting the Community Connectors project
- Run 15 training sessions
- Continue memberships with advice networks
- Attend 12 ad hoc events

Improving the customer experience



- Signlive partnership - offering BSL translations
- Run another vulnerability awareness week internally
- Launch our online eligibility calculator
- Continue to comply with British Standard for Inclusive Services
- Continued customer journey mapping including customers on PSR
- Creating a bereavement online form
- Improving an independent advice page on our website
- Hit 300 staff as friends against scams
- Explore the use of lived experience panels
- Experts gave talks to staff on different topics of vulnerability
- Agree and Sign up to Water Industry Principles for Economic Abuse
- Looking at signposting options for website - stepsearch

Our initiatives going forward...

Workstream	Wessex Water initiatives to 2030	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Using data wisely	Smart metering We will fit 240,000 smart meters to help household customers in more water stressed areas of our region have more control over their water and energy use.		2
	Innovative tariffs We will continue to look at how we can design tariffs that create the right incentives for customers and help tackle affordability.		1
	Evolved data mapping We will build on and develop our extensive demographic data mapping using our own and external sources of information such as socioeconomic status, benefits data, disposable income, health measures, conditions, and disabilities as well as local authority data on free school meals and benefit recipients. We will layer this data to get a comprehensive view of affordability and vulnerability at the customer level. This will help us identify customers who need extra help, target our information campaigns, and quantify the proportion we are already supporting. By sharing the data with our partners, we will continue to help them identify hotspot areas and target outreach services. We will also work on embedding this intelligence into our systems, improving how we make decisions and how we identify customers who need extra help in real-time. We will explore a range of demographic and water poverty tools that may help us target customers in need of support most.	1 3 5	1 2
	Full use of data sharing We will introduce new data sharing agreements with the other councils, social landlords, energy suppliers and the fire service in our region to make it as easy and quick as possible for customers to receive the support we offer. We will use this data to automatically apply bill reductions to customers or add customers to our PSR where we can without the need to complete an application. We will work on the National Data Share project and support Northumbrians Support for All project. We will also make full use of data sharing (based on the Digital Economy Act).	1 3	2 4
	Data sharing with Scope We will explore data sharing with Scope to auto enrol customers to schemes.		2
	Identify, tailor, communicate To better identify customers who need extra help and allow us to tailor our communication and collections more effectively, we will introduce more sophisticated segmentation within our billing and debt recovery systems utilising multiple internal and external data sources.		2
	Behavioural insights Behavioural insights such as payment behaviour and contact frequency help us to identify customers who need additional support. We will use behavioural techniques such as 'nudging' to encourage take-up of services such as TAP or Priority Services.	3	1
	Monitoring developments We will follow national and local developments that have the potential to increase or decrease the vulnerability of our customers and continuously assess their implications for our work.	3	1



















* See key on page 26

Workstream	Wessex Water initiatives to 2030	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Using data wisely (continued)	Open banking We will explore working with new financial technology companies to provide customers access to open banking solutions either directly or via our partners. There is a range of products available that use open banking to help people better manage and clear their debt, provide support to make financial plans, increase their financial well-being, reduce their uncertainty from one month to the next and throw them a lifeline at times of crisis.		1 2
	Water poverty tool We will continue to explore the use of water poverty tools to better understand who needs extra help and address water poverty.		2
	Explore referral partnerships Explore referral partnerships where data is shared back improving the customer journey.	3	2 6
	Explore referral portals Explore referral portals which we can use to get customers to independent debt advice quicker and improve the customer journey.	3	2 6
	Auto-enrol customers onto schemes We will explore more opportunities to auto-enrol certain groups of customers on to social tariffs - care leavers, those with mental ill health, terminal illness, parent carers, those with a disability or medical condition. Also could the care leaver Assist scheme with local authorities be broadened e.g., homeless moving into a home.		1
	Priority Services welcome Developing our welcome to Priority Services further so customers understand what services they have signed up for for individual needs	1 4	
	Voice analytic technology We will explore the use of voice analytic technology to better serve customers who need extra help.	1 3	2
Growing Partnerships	Continuing evolution We will continue to learn from and directly involve our partner organisations and stakeholders, including our Vulnerability Advisory Panel, in the ongoing evolution of our support for customers who need extra help.	1 2	1 2
	National groups Membership of national forums such as the Money Advice and Pensions Service, the Money Advice Liaison Group, Rural Services Partnership, Rural England, Disability Rights UK, and the Collaboration Network, illustrates our support for work around vulnerability at a national level and gives us the opportunity to champion the needs of our water customers who need extra help.	1 2	1 2
	Improved Partner Hub Stage two of improvements to our Partner Hub will include further development with bespoke content and sign-in features. We will link this to our stakeholder relationship management system.	3	1 2 4 6
	Data sharing We will explore data sharing with credit reference agencies.		1 2

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Wessex Water initiatives to 2030	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Growing Partnerships (continued)	Community project funding We will continue to fund a variety of environmental and community projects through the Wessex Water Foundation, focusing on schemes we have previously funded that are shown to be effective and innovative.	1 3	1 2
	Extended online application We will ensure our online application service for advice partners remains up to date with the Standard Financial Statement and trigger figures and any other developments in the delivery of debt advice.		1 6
	Increased partner network Our network of partners already exceeds 300. We will continue to create new partnerships with cultural, religious, local niche groups, health centres, hospitals and GPs, half-way houses, day care centres, Mumsnet, baby banks, health visitors, midwives, Life Line, Neighbourhood Watch, Motability centres, energy suppliers, health charities, domestic violence organisations and specific disease/disability clinics. We will continue to offer free training and promotional resources to all new partners and supermarkets, establish an effective way of working with them and their clients that suits them best. We will add all new and existing partners to our new partnership tiers.	3	1 2 4 6
	Resource West Collaborating with other water companies and energy distributors in the south west through Resource West.	3	1
	Care leaver convenient Following the introduction of Care Leave Assist we will look to join the care leavers covenant.	2 3	2 6
	Cross company working Working in collaboration with Wellbeing and Culture Inclusivity and diversity teams across the business.	3	2
	Referral opportunities We'll explore and seek out more opportunities to increase the number of referral partners we work with..	3	1 4 6
	Promotional resources Our aim is to develop even more innovative, free, and bespoke promotional resources for partners.	2	1 2 4 6
	Joint projects To reach customers who need extra help and promote available support, we will develop and fund additional joint projects with partners such as local authorities, housing and social care providers and foodbanks, building on lessons learned from previous projects such as Wiltshire Council, Wellington Homes, RAD, Scope and Kidney Care UK.	3 5	1 2
Community Engagement	Stakeholder events We will continue to attend and support public and stakeholder events with our partners across our communities. We'll use learning from other events and community work to make them engaging and interactive, and we'll promote them via our Partner Hub.	2 3	1 2

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Wessex Water initiatives to 2030	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Community Engagement (continued)	Proactive advice Advice networks in the Wessex Water region include Wiltshire Money, Bristol Older People's Forum, Connecting Advice in Dorset, North Somerset Together, Advice UK, Advice centres for Avon, Advice North Somerset, and the Bristol Financial Inclusion Forum. Continuing to work proactively with these networks will increase the depth and breadth of our local partnerships.		
	Community projects We will support community projects by providing staff volunteers through our Water Force programme.		
	Rainwater separation Support customers to save water and money and separate their surface water at source by offering them a free Home Check visit, a free water butt along with solutions to divert the rainwater from their roofs.		
	Community outreach coordinators Introduce two new community outreach coordinators who will set up drop-in sessions across our region to talk to customers face-to-face in the community about bills, water efficiency, metering, affordability help and priority services.		
Improving the customer experience	Research We will undertake research with customers - particularly those on Priority Services - to gain invaluable feedback on their experience of billing and operational contact, which we can use in our continuous improvement programme overseen by our Customer Experience Group. We will explore the options to work with customers who have lived experience of vulnerability.		
	Journey mapping We will regularly review our customer journeys to make sure they meet the needs of customers who may need extra support. Areas of focus in the future will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access and registration (single sign up for TAP and Priority Services) • digital opportunities such as providing photographic evidence • communication channels ie, looking at Whatsapp as a contact channel, or video calling (general and during events). 		
	Continuous review We will continuously review the eligibility criteria for Priority Services and TAP. We will use research to inform our product enhancement recommendations.		
	Filling the gap We will continue to provide our own service with specially trained members of staff for those customers who cannot or will not access independent debt advice and may be excluded from accessing support through TAP.		
	Specialist training We will build on our existing Going the Extra Mile (GEM) training programme and identify further opportunities for specialist training for our customer-facing staff. This follows the success of training with Mind, Money Advice Trust, Samaritans, and the Alzheimer's Society. We will continue to develop eLearning modules, information videos and continue to run our in-house vulnerability roadshows.		
	Self-service We will introduce additional and effective self-service capabilities on our customer billing portal, and we will link this to TAP and Priority Services.		

* See key on page 26

Workstream	Wessex Water initiatives to 2030	Service for all*	Paying fair*
Improving the customer experience (continued)	Smart conversations Conversational platforms such as Amazon Alexa are an opportunity for us to develop support for Priority Services customers.	1	
	Website accessibility Following the WCAG 2.1 AA audit, we will continue to make improvements to ensure our website is fully compliant, accessible to all and tested using lived experts.	2	2
	Economic abuse We will develop a web page dedicated to the principles of economic abuse - we will explore the use of the a Green Exit button on this page.	3	2
	National Cold Call Protocol We have adopted the principals within the protocol but aim to formalise this and raise awareness within the business.	1	5
	Improve our digital affordability journey Implement and trial a project with IE Hub and Money Wellness where customers can complete a budget online and be referred to debt advice if needed.		1
	Use of Sightline Streetworks We will explore the use of Sightline streetworks additional to the Highways code of Practice we already follow.	1	
	Signposting to Floodline Introduce touchpoints for customers where we can promote the Environment Agency's floodline.	1	
	Signposting to Telecoms We have updated our online form but we will explore more touchpoints where we can signpost our customers to the Telecoms, Broadband and pay-TV Priority Services.	3	
	Accessible sites Consider introducing trampers to enhance what we already offer at our accessible sites.	1	
	WaterSure review We will In the case of applications relating to medical conditions outside of those named in the regulations move to a self declaration approach removing the need for a signed letter from a GP. We aim to use the DWP data share to help automate renewal for the family element of the scheme. We will also take part in the CCW review of WaterSure.		1 2
	Innovative touchpoints We will identify further and more innovative touchpoints such as improved bill design, meter installations, welcome packs, signage, social media, van sides, giveaways that can be used to promote support services.	2	1
Customer influence Invite customers with lived experience of needing extra help to share their story at our stakeholder VAP meetings.	1 2	1	

* See key on page 26

Using data wisely



- Explore Data Sharing with Scope
- Increase data shares with councils and fire services
- Identify our vulnerability and water poverty gaps
- Be a member of the steering group for Northumbrian support for all hub pilots /National data share workstreams
- Continue to explore referral portals with debt advice agencies
- Continue to work on opportunities to auto-enrol certain groups of customers to social tariffs - care leavers, those with mental ill health, terminal illness, parent carers, those with a disability or medical condition

Growing partnerships



- Exploring opportunities to work with Marie Curie
- Collaborating with other water companies and energy distributors in the south west through Resource West
- Continue our project with Kidney Care UK
- Joining the care leavers covenant
- Grow Partnership tiers with partners
- Run two debt advice workshops for funded partners
- Put £315k into the Wessex Water Fund for debt advice and the Community Fund
- Continue memberships in Money Advice Liaison Group, Rural Services Partnership, Rural England, Disability Rights UK, Collaboration Network
- Start to advertise our schemes and priority services in hospitals
- Working in collaboration with Wellbeing and Culture Inclusivity and diversity teams across the business

Community engagement



- Continue memberships with advice networks
- Introduce two new community outreach coordinators
- Run 10 training sessions
- Attend 10 ad hoc events

Improving the customer experience



- Run another vulnerability awareness week internally
- Work towards the new ISO inclusive service standard
- Hit 1000 staff as friends against scams
- Develop work with customers who have lived experience
- Experts give talks to staff on different topics of vulnerability
- End to end incident management review and Smart Meter Journey Mapping with PSR personas
- Continue to work with our Digital team to ensure website accessibility
- Implement and trial our project with IE Hub and Money Wellness
- Gather customer research with those on PSR and social tariffs

The importance of our 'growing partnerships' workstream

Breaking down barriers to engagement

Our partnerships have been highly effective. We were given a social policy award by Citizens Advice and highlighted as an example of best practice in the Money Advice and Pensions Service Strategic Toolkit for Creditors.

Partnerships with advice organisations are vitally important to break down the barriers of engagement with customers, particularly those in financial vulnerability. We not only fund debt advice agencies who refer on to TAP but we also work with a wide range of other advice/support organisations to support customers who need extra help. We work with our partners in whatever way they wish.

The debt advice sector

Customers who need the most support from us, such as the discounts available on our Assist tariff, are required to seek independent debt advice, be that face to face, online or over the telephone.

We have developed very successful partnerships over the years with the debt advice sector and other organisations supporting customers who need extra help. Our first was with a local Citizens Advice just outside Bath in 2005 and we've gone on to partner with all Citizens Advice across our region as well as StepChange, National Debt Line, Christians Against Poverty, Scope, Money Wellness and a range of local independent debt advice agencies including cultural, faith, foodbanks and niche organisations, along with tenant support workers in housing associations and councils.

We signpost or refer to and fund these agencies. We believe it's essential that customers receive holistic debt advice and budgeting support along with income maximisation. It is never just about water; customers generally have multiple debts to multiple creditors. These trusted third parties are far better able to determine a sustainable offer of payment, however small, based on true ability to pay.

We provide our partners with a dedicated relationship manager and regular meetings through the year. We also hold annual workshops to share and learn. Partners have access to a dedicated team in our billing centre for queries and applications to our schemes with a direct dial freephone and access to a range of free resources. We provide a full, free training service for their staff and volunteers on all our support schemes.

Partners have played an integral part in the co-design of TAP, this wider vulnerability strategy and more recently taken part in the CCW pilot we completed.

Funding debt advice partners

We currently fund 34 organisations to provide this support to our customers. Since 2020 we have had a commitment in place to receive at least 2,300 successful applications for TAP each year from our debt advice partners. As a result the numbers of customers supported by TAP is increasing year on year.

In addition, we fund community based projects through the Wessex Water Foundation.

Our total funding is around £400,000 per year.

In 2022-23, we predicted an increase in demand for debt advice services due to the cost-of-living crisis and many agencies were still struggling to get back to full capacity post Covid. So, we injected an additional £160,000 into the sector.

This funded 7 new projects which were a mix of additional debt advisor training courses, funding more advisor roles and hours, establishing new cost-of-living advisor roles, and funding presence in warm spaces and other outreach. These are now complete and were very successful.

In-home advice

For those customers who cannot or will not access independent debt advice we provide our own in-home service with specially trained members of staff.

We currently fund 34 debt advice partners to provide support to our customers



Widening our partnerships

Over the last ten years, we have worked hard to grow our partnerships beyond debt advice. Our network of partners already exceeds 300.

Through the initiatives in our growing partnerships workstream, we aim to raise awareness and increase take up of our schemes. We aim to increase the number and variety of our partners and to work with them in a way that suits them to best engage with their clients, who are our customers. Examples of organisations we work with are councils, health charities, the DWP, housing associations, children's charities, food banks to name a few.

We established PartnerHub our bespoke partners' website (partnerhub.wessexwater.co.uk) in 2017 and following this produced our quarterly e-newsletter PartnerHub Post. We offer many resources such as training videos, training sessions, bespoke promotional materials, and fund specific projects.

We value our membership of national forums such as Money Advice and Pensions Service, Money Advice Liaison Group, ESAN (The Essential Services access network), Rural Services Partnership, Rural England, Disability Rights UK, Institute of Customer Service, Citizens Advice cost-of-living Briefings, the Business Disability Forum, Safe Guarding Working Group, and the Collaboration Network. Through these, we can demonstrate our support for work around vulnerability at a national level, champion the needs of our water customers who need extra help and learn from best practice.

We're also members of several local advice networks in the Wessex Water region including Wiltshire Money, Bristol Older People's Forum, Advice Dorset Partnership, North Somerset Cost of Living working group, Advice UK, Advice centres for Avon, BANES Income Maximisation Group, and BANES interagency group. Through these, we can proactively work with and contribute to forums and newsletters reaching a wider variety of local partners.

Partnership Tiers

In 2023 we launched our Partnership Tiers, distinguishing those partners who simply want to advertise our services from those who want to sign post or ultimately refer onto our schemes. The three tiers of partnership help us improve our engagement with tailored updates and better track how we can work best with each organisation. It also gives partners an opportunity to officially say they are a Wessex Water partner.

Tier	Who	How you work with us	What you get from us
1	<p>Members will work with us in one or more of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funded to provide independent advice • have a data share agreement with us • be a Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel member • be an affiliate organisation - of whom we are a member • train other organisations on our schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be well informed of, provide expert advice to, and influence our Vulnerability Strategy. • Collaborate on joint projects to help reach more customers and raise awareness of schemes. • As a funded partner follow the criteria on our PartnerHub website • Sign up to our PartnerHub Post enews. • Use PartnerHub to order resources (leaflets/social media pack etc) or directly access our online form. • Use resources on PartnerHub to be informed of our affordability schemes. (Receive our training pack or downloaded videos). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listed in our Vulnerability Strategy and our PartnerHub website as a Vulnerability Partner, which is seen by other stakeholders. • Use our Wessex Water logo and let people know you are working 'in partnership' with us. • Quarterly e-newsletter PartnerHub Post. • Use of our PartnerHub website. • Relevant communications based on your tier of partnership. • More information on being a funded partner can be found on our PartnerHub website. • Free training on our schemes for your staff and volunteers.
2	<p>Members will provide advice and direct referrals or signpost customers to our schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up to our PartnerHub Post enews. • Use PartnerHub to order resources (leaflets/social media pack etc) or directly access our online forms. • Use resources on PartnerHub to be informed of our affordability schemes. (Receive our training pack or downloaded videos). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to apply for funding under our Community Fund. • We can attend community events or get involved in community projects you are working on to reach customers in financial difficulty.
3	<p>Members will advertise our schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up to our PartnerHub Post enews. • Use PartnerHub to order resources (leaflets/social media pack etc). 	

Here is a list of some of the partners in each tier. The remainder will be placed into a tier over the coming year or so.

Tier 1 - Includes 34 funded partners, 14 Vulnerability Advisory Panel members, 20 affiliated organisations and 6 data share partners:

Talking Money	CA West Somerset	Centre for Sustainable Energy
Scope	CA North Somerset	South and East Bristol Foodbank
StepChange	Faithworks Wessex	Grace Advocacy
Money Advice Trust,	Filwood Hope	Bristol Somali Resource Centre
Christians Against Poverty	South Bristol Advice Service	Community Money Advice Melksham
CA Bristol	Hope Debt Advice Service	Data share partners (see right)
CA BANES	St Pauls Advice Centre	Vulnerability Advisory Panel members (see page 5)
CA Bridport and District	North Bristol Advice	National and local forums (see page 39)
CA Central Dorset	Bristol North West Foodbank	IE Hub
CA Somerset	1625 Independent people	Kidney Care UK
CA Bournemouth	Ignite Life	
CA Christchurch & Poole	Money Wellness	
CA South	Trowbridge Debt Advice	
CA Gloucestershire	Brigstowe	
CA Wiltshire	Navigate	
CA East Dorset and Purbeck		

Tier 2 - Includes:

The Rise Trust	Doorway Wiltshire	Baby Bank Network
Salvation Army	RNIB	Turn2Us
Emmaus Bristol	The Nest Project	The Nest Project
Springboard	Selwood Housing Group	GreenSquare
Opportunity Group		Accord

Tier 3 - Includes:

Bristol City Council	Rethink Mental Illness	Wiltshire Council.
Golden-Oldies	The Gospel Truth Church	
Waste-Not-Want-Not		

For more information, or to sign up or confirm your tier as a Wessex Water Partner contact communitypartners@wessexwater.co.uk

Data sharing

We now have data sharing agreements with:

The DWP	North Somerset Council
National Grid Electricity Distribution	South Gloucestershire Council
Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks	Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service.

Through these agreements we are able to share and receive data of customers who either need to be on Priority Services or need help with their water bill or debt.

In many cases we are able to automatically enrol customers onto our support schemes without the need for them to apply.

We have a longstanding, successful relationship with Wessex Water. We frequently collaborate and share best practice to deliver better outcomes for our customers. We have worked on many joint projects and even hosted a joint event to raise awareness with new and existing partners.

It's great to have recently started two-way data sharing of Priority Services data having been sharing our records one way for the past four years. Working together helps drive innovation, enables us to be more effective and delivers more value for our customers.

I am looking forward to becoming a member of Wessex Water's stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel and having the opportunity to share best practice and influence change for customers in vulnerable situations.

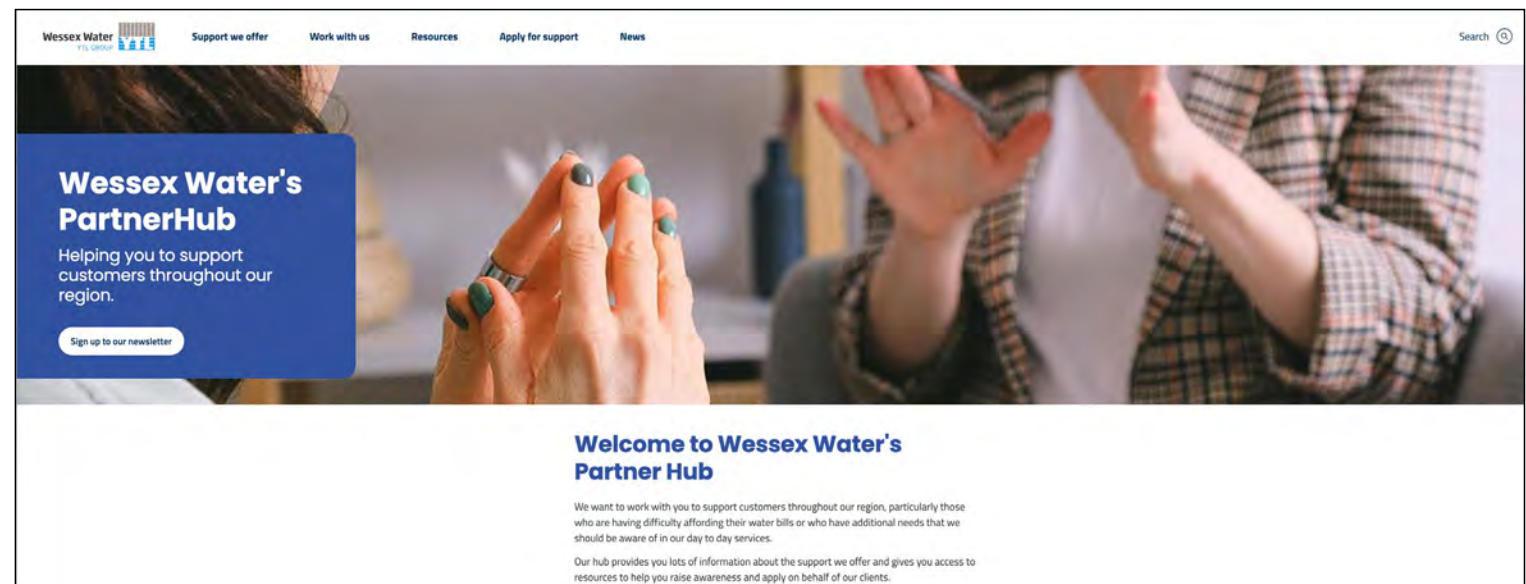
Nicki Johnson National Grid Electricity Distribution



Working in partnership

Benefits of partnership working		
To customers	To advice organisations	To Wessex Water
Improved access to impartial and independent free advice	A creditor who trusts their judgement and accepts their assessment of ability to pay	Ability to identify those who can't afford to pay
Benefits advice and income maximisation	Sustainable solution for clients to help them afford ongoing water charges and/or repay debt	Increased cash collection which more than covers additional administration costs of TAP and reduces the impact on other customers' bills
Holistic approach to debt management dealing with debts in a sensible and sustainable way	Funding to increase capacity and see more clients	Expert advice from advice agency staff to help us co-create innovative new tariffs and schemes and to improve our processes
Water bill they can afford to pay and no outstanding debt to worry about	Joint working in the community and free resources	Increase in awareness among our customers of TAP along with water meters, water efficiency advice, Priority Services etc
Auto-enrolled to schemes without the need to apply	Ability to co-create tariffs, schemes and process change with a creditor	Data share agreements to quickly identify those needing support

We established PartnerHub our bespoke partners' website in 2017 offering resources such as training videos, training sessions, bespoke promotional materials, and funding for specific projects.



Funding in the community

Financial capability – Money Matters

Although we offer a wide range of support to customers who are already financially vulnerable, we have a wider role to play in society to help customers avoid getting into difficulty in the first place. We are strong advocates of improving financial capability and budgeting skills, so we set up our Money Matters scheme in 2013. We have funded 52 Money Matters projects aimed at improving financial capability and budgeting skills among a diverse range of customer groups.

Hard to reach projects

Organisations face the same challenges as us engaging with customers and their funding levels often mean they are unable to offer sufficient local community-based outreach services.

We have used our own data to help organisations identify hot spots in their geographic areas where outreach services would be beneficial. We have funded 27 projects aimed at raising awareness and increasing take-up of assistance among our hardest to reach customers.

We actively encouraged groups to test new and innovative approaches, with no penalty for failure, as this is about identifying solutions that work. We have shared the evaluation of these projects so that effective and innovative models can be rolled out by others.

Wessex Water Foundation

The Wessex Water Foundation provides funding to projects that strengthen communities and benefit the local environment.

It has never been more important to both respond to the needs of our communities and make a firm commitment to support them now and in the future, and the Wessex Water Foundation allows us to do just that.

The foundation was launched in 2020 in partnership with the Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and Quartet Community Foundations, which help to ensure our funding goes towards the communities that are in most need of support.

Grants totalling at least £500,000 are distributed every year. We have two main grant rounds with open applications, the Community Fund and Environment Fund which are open to the community each year. The Foundation also distributes the core debt advice funding mentioned earlier in this strategy and five-year grants for larger environmental projects through the Partners Programme.

The Community Fund opens every autumn and aims to support community-based activities or projects that meet a local need and seek to improve the lives of local people. These activities or projects should be informed by the people or community they serve and have considerable reach, with priority given to work that fulfils one of more of the following:

- takes place in areas of multiple deprivation or rural isolation where people lack access to local services

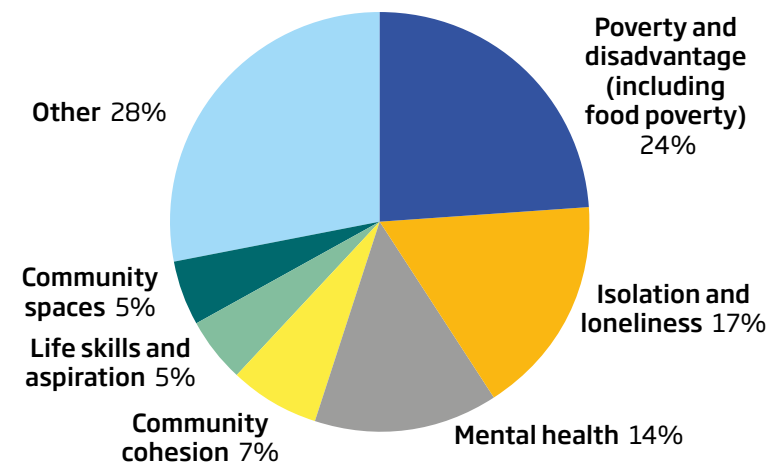
- helps build stronger communities - enabling people to work together and create solutions to local challenges
- helps people take steps to manage or avoid debt and build their financial capability. This can include activities that raises awareness and take up of utility affordability support such as the Wessex Water schemes.

Grants of up to £4,000 are awarded.

In 2023-24 the Community Fund supported several groups including:

- Dorset-based charity, Home-Start Wessex, were awarded £2,899 to provide an outdoor community weekly drop-in session offering support for isolated parents with children under 5
- Wiltshire-based charity, West Lavington Youth Club, were Awarded £4,000 to provide weekly support to children, helping them build confidence and accessing opportunities otherwise not available to them due to rural deprivation/disadvantage. Manager Josh Newton said: "Since the club re-opened after the pandemic it became obvious that demand had grown and there were risks young people would have to be turned away to stop sessions becoming too crowded. "The grant has made a massive difference as we can now accommodate the number of kids wanting to come along"
- Somerset-based charity, Diversity Voice, were awarded £3,000 in to provide a debt management and budgeting course for refugees. Alongside another Somerset-based charity, Navigate, they also created a specialist course for refugees leaving sponsored accommodation and moving into their own homes
- Quartet Community Foundation and Bristol-based charity, Alive Activities, were awarded £2,995 to deliver weekly social and therapeutic horticulture community gardening sessions to improve the lives of people living in a deprived inner-city area and help to build a stronger community.

Top issues addressed by the Community Fund



A measure of our success

This next section gives you some more detail of our work through a series of case studies.

CASE STUDY

Supporting customers through the cost-of-living crisis

We are concerned about the enormous pressures on household finances from the cost-of-living crisis particularly when many are still recovering from the impact of Covid. This year's increase in water bills, albeit small compared to energy, will still be unwelcome.

We have already explained throughout this document many of the changes we are making and the initiatives we have aimed at supporting customers in financial circumstances.

Here are a few key new changes as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Data matching with the DWP

In early 2023 we started to share data with the DWP. We are focussing on our discount for low-income pensioners as eligibility for that scheme is benefits related. If we know that the customer is in receipt of pension credit, we can automatically apply a 20% discount to their bill.

Fast Track Assist

We launched a new approach for our main social tariff, Assist, in 2022/23 making it easier and quicker for customers to access the large discounts that Assist can provide.

When a customer gets in touch, we will apply a discount of 50% immediately to their bill if Assist is felt to be the best option for their financial circumstances. They are then be asked to seek debt advice and once that has been done and we understand the correct level of discount needed, we adjust the Assist band and backdate

if required. We will only backdate in favour of the customer, not the other way around. This approach gives customers more peace of mind and our debt advice partners longer to carry out their holistic assessment.

We continue to offer this support but are keeping it under review as agency capacity is improving and referrals are increasing.


#DebtAwarenessWeek

“The schemes offered by Wessex Water are **simple and easy to access** alongside the other debt advice and support we offer.”



Jude
Advisor, Citizens Advice Somerset

#DebtAwarenessWeek



“Wessex Water’s support schemes can help by **reducing monthly payments** to an agreed affordable amount.”

Loraine
Advisor, Citizens Advice Somerset

We will apply a discount of 50% immediately if Assist is the best option

Promotional activities

Affordability messaging is already very prominent on bills, in billing-associated literature, and on our website and we continually promote our support via our magazine, e-news articles, and through more than 300 partners. In addition, over the last year we have:

- increased the messaging on our bills and on our website to highlight next year's expected bill rise, how customers can get help to pay their bills, and how they can also save water to save money
- carried out targeted social media messaging across our region using a cost of living/struggling to pay message which has been very successful
- provided promotional flyers in parent packs given out in Chippenham, one of our Community Connector areas
- advertised within a magazine we provided to schools in Chippenham
- advertised in hospital magazines
- advertised on petrol pumps in deprived areas of our region
- published an article in Kidney Matters magazine
- included a double-spread cost-of-living article in our own Autumn magazine
- promoted affordability support to Wessex Water colleagues, their friends, and families during Talk Money Week
- funded some Public Living Rooms in council areas and provided promotional flyers. Public living rooms are safe, warm spaces set up in community centres, church halls, and some cafes where hot drinks, phone charging facilities, and internet connection are provided for those most in need
- encouraged and enabled our many partners to promote our schemes through our PartnerHub post.

Building new partnerships

- Data sharing with local councils so we can offer help to customers receiving support with their Council Tax. We used our data share partnership with North Somerset Council to auto enrol customers onto our Discount for low-income pensioners.

- Working with South Gloucestershire Council we introduced care leavers Assist, giving a 90% bill reduction to those leaving care and becoming bill payers for the first time.
- Working with our two energy distribution networks and Bristol Water to co-fund a project with the Royal Association for the Deaf (RAD). RAD are signposting or registering customers in our region for Priority Services and/or affordability support through promotional literature, social media, community outreach events and home visits.
- Following a successful pilot last year, we continue to work with Money Wellness who offer free confidential debt advice, budgeting tips and tools, and access to financial well-being counselling. We directly refer our customers to them for debt advice through a web portal and with consent can receive customer data back to help us identify the right support scheme for them.
- Working with Bristol Water to fund a partnership with Kidney Care UK who will deliver projects aimed at increasing awareness of Priority Services and WaterSure to those living with chronic kidney disease (CKD).
- Running a pilot with IE Hub, a tool that allows customers to complete their income and expenditure statement online. We will receive the completed budget and be able to apply a suitable affordability scheme. If the customers need debt advice, they will be referred to Money Wellness to complete their journey.
- Exploring different projects under our Resource West Partnership such as working with Marie Curie, advertising in hospitals and joint customer research.

Wessex Water
Sponsored · 🌐

If you're worried about the cost of living and struggling to pay bills, please get in touch so we can help.

Don't leave it too late. Free support is available and you could have a lower bill.

Visit <https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/help-to-pay>

Struggling with the cost of living?

Get help with your water bill

£

Wessex Water
Sponsored · 🌐

With Christmas coming up, money worries and the cost of living may be on your mind.

Don't wait until the New Year to get help. You could have a lower water bill if you're struggling to pay.

Find free support at:
<https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/help-to-pay>

We can offer help to customers receiving support with their Council Tax

CASE STUDY

Helping remote customers with Citizen Advice East Dorset and Purbeck's Advice Bus

As part of our response to the cost of living crisis we injected an additional £160,000 into the debt advice sector across our region to help ease capacity. Funding included requirements to support those needing help with their water bills and completing applications for our support schemes. We are funding seven projects, a mix of more debt advisor roles and hours, training courses, putting debt advisor presence in warm spaces, and a cost-of-living advisor.

One project we chose to fund was Citizen Advice East Dorset and Purbeck's (EDP) advice bus. The bus will provide a drop-in advice service and advertise the opportunity to come and access digital assistance locally. This will enable Citizen Advice EDP to reach rural parts of the community and offer a holistic advice service which includes helping customers afford their water bills. The bus has been able to help customers with a variety of issues such as:

- appointments for digital form filling or to create a budget. Advisers are able to offer additional support to increase financial resilience
- further appointments for income maximisation, helping clients to claim DWP benefits as appropriate or supporting them to challenge benefit decisions to increase their income
- refer clients to specialist caseworkers, for example to apply for our Assist tariff, deal with any debt, homelessness prevention, or employment, to further support financial stability
- direct access to the Dorset Energy Unit - a team of NVQ trained energy caseworkers, who will be able to assist them with uploading documents and bills and access charitable grants online.

Within the first month of being in action, the advisors saw over 100 clients and around 54 of those had more complex issues.

Feedback has been excellent, and the advisers have been at full capacity



CASE STUDY

Supporting our customers living with dementia

There are over 900,000 people in the UK living with some form of dementia. We are committed to being a Dementia Friendly organisation. Here are some examples of how we are working towards that goal.

Gold Award

In September 2022 and September 2023 we received a Gold Award from Bristol Dementia Action Alliance (BDAA) recognised for:

- Having Dementia Friends
- Working effectively with BDAA
- Proactive communications during Dementia Awareness week
- Support for customers living with dementia
- Looking for best practice
- Attending events.



Supporting the Avon and Somerset Police Dementia Safeguarding Scheme

In 2021 and 2022 we purchased Dementia Wristbands. Following the success of that initiative, we've funded 30 GPS tracking devices plus other wearable items.

It's all part of the Dementia Safeguard Scheme that enables families and carers to provide information to help identify a vulnerable person if they go missing.



Virtual Dementia Tour Bus

We arranged for the Virtual Dementia Tour Bus to visit our Operations Centre in Bath. Staff experienced what it can be like living with dementia.

Staff climbed on board and undertook a series of challenges to alter and overload their senses and demonstrate just how difficult and deflating it can be to carry out some simple daily tasks.

2,000 Dementia Friends

To mark our achievement of more than 2,000 Dementia Friends, we visited the Forget Me Not Club in Bath to present them with an Alzheimer's Society dementia clock.

The Forget Me Not Club was founded in 2020. Its vision is to make a difference for people with dementia and their carers.

The staff prepare home-cooked meals for their clients on-site, and provide therapeutic activities and companionship in a warm and caring environment.

The clock helps people with dementia keep track of the day, date and time while supporting independence.

Woodspring Dementia Directory

Working with Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire NHS's Woodspring Locality Partnership we supported and featured in their Dementia Directory. A local guide to support people living with dementia, their careers and support network in Woodspring, North Somerset. 5,000 copies of the directory were printed to be distributed amongst patients, carers and relatives from the first contact in primary care, support service, community Hubs and support groups. It can also be accessed digitally.

The directory holds a wealth of information that will help support the community. You can find out more via the [Healthwatch North Somerset website](#) - Supporting people living with dementia.



We are committed to being a Dementia Friendly organisation

Scope - Water bill accessibility testing

SCOPE = Equality for disabled people

We have been working with Scope the disability charity since 2021.

We asked them to review our customer bills to improve accessibility and customer experience.

First of all, Scope's own experts identified changes we should make to the language and colour used on our bills.

Then we tested our new style bills with a customer panel which included two adults with sight impairment and two adults with mental health challenges. This helped us:

- understand how effective the improvements were for those with specific access needs
- explore how well customers can read and understand the information presented to them
- uncover any remaining accessibility or comprehension barriers, and
- identify any further improvements we could make.

The bills were well received and all participants were able to find the information they needed from the first few pages.

We have worked on further changes for the 2023/24 bills.

We have been working with Scope the disability charity since 2021

Our testers

These are profiles of some of the people we spoke to during our research. They're intended to give a brief overview of who's we spoke to in our research sessions, and share their context when it comes to paying utility bills.

Leanne
Visually impaired

About her impairment
Leanne has had low vision for a number of years - she has lost her central vision due to early onset macular degeneration and cataracts, but has some sight in her peripheral vision.

Experience with utility bills
She can read but requires text to be large font sizes to make it easier for her.

Support and assistive tech
She describes herself as "eccentric" and uses a magnifying glass to help when text is small.

Grace
Autistic and has anxiety

About her impairment
Grace was diagnosed as being Autistic.

Experience with utility bills
She feels that she is good at staying organised and organising bills.

Support and assistive tech
Advice from her mum to know what to read and organise bills.

Felicity
Dyslexic and has ADHD

About her impairment
Felicity is "profoundly dyslexic" and also has ADHD.

Experience with utility bills
She absolutely hates doing admin - it's a nightmare.

Support and assistive tech
Setup phone and laptop with high contrast to make it easier to read. Use a font to help people with dyslexia to read. Use content (to listen back on her computer).

What they need to read
In plain English - avoid jargon. Use concise content (avoid large blocks of text).

Oscar
Partially sighted

About his impairment
Oscar was involved in a car accident in 2014 that left him partially sighted, and now has a glass eye.

Experience with utility bills
He has most of his bills set up with Direct Debit for convenience and likes to make sure his bills are paid before spending money on anything else. He receives most of his utility bills online - as this is easier for him to pinch and zoom in to read things more clearly. He does get some correspondence by post but has requested for them to be sent in large print to make it easier for him to read.

Support and assistive tech
Magnifying glasses that he uses when reading written documents (including an electronic one that allows him to adjust lighting / colours). Gets help reading from his social worker and close friends as back-up. Uses Alexa and other smart appliances he can talk to use.

What they need to read
Large fonts with good contrast (ideally black text on white background). Content is split up into short, manageable chunks.

CASE STUDY

Accessible sites

During 2020-22 we carried out accessibility reviews of our sites which covered:

- how easy it is to find information on the website
- any barriers to traveling to and arriving at the site
- any issues preventing accessible access around the site within recommended standards
- information that should be included in any signage.

We have now completed work on our Sutton Bingham and Clatworthy reservoir sites to make them more accessible for all.

The work included making the site more accessible through the installation of suitable pathways, improving gradients and sightlines, accessible seating, opening up areas that were previously blocked to wheelchair users, and improving the signage information.

Helen, a colleague and customer who is a wheelchair user, went to test our new layout and paths and picnic tables. She gave us some really good feedback as well as pointers on changing the wording on our website from 'walks' to 'exploring' our sites which will be updated soon. Helen said: "I will definitely be returning at a weekend with my family, it is a lovely relaxing place that really is accessible, and with a few additions will make it even better for all."

The images provide an example of the new paths, benches, and tables with an overhang for wheelchairs.

"...it is a lovely relaxing place that really is accessible"



Accessible toilet



0345 600 4 600

wessexwater.co.uk

Wessex Water
YTL GROUP



CASE STUDY

Meet Eileen and Susan

Eileen is one of the many customers we've helped when they were struggling to pay their water bills.

She offered to share her experience to help other customers like her. Eileen is now water debt free and managing her bills much better.

As a single parent of four children and a widow of 16 years, Eileen was struggling to juggle work with bringing up her children on her own. She found herself in debt and sought independent debt advice before applying for help with her water bill.

We placed Eileen on a reduced bill with our Assist tariff to match what she could afford to pay.

We also helped Eileen clear the debt she had built up through our on our debt support scheme Restart.

Eileen paid a set amount for two years, and after that time we cleared her remaining water debt.

Eileen is now debt free and able to afford her water bill.

When asked if she would recommend friends and family to contact Wessex Water if they were struggling, Eileen said: "Yes, and I already have! It made a big difference and helped me so much when I was struggling and made things so much easier. If it makes things easier for them, then I can't see why they wouldn't."

We are using Eileen's story to encourage other customers to reach out and ask us for help if they are struggling.

We met Susan when we visited a Renal unit in a local hospital with Kidney Care UK as part of a drop-in session. Susan was struggling with her bills and due to her ill health couldn't contact us and let us help her with her debt. Susan is now registered for Priority Services and is paying directly from her benefits towards her bill which now includes our discount for low-income pensioners. We have also put her onto our debt support scheme Restart so she will become debt-free.

Susan agreed to let us film her story with Kidney Care UK earlier this year so we can demonstrate how we can help others in similar positions.

Listen to Eileen's story in her own words



Listen to Susan's story in her own words



Developing a simplified application process for support schemes

In May 2021 CCW published recommendations and actions for water companies in their independent review of water affordability.

One of the proposed actions was that all water companies should operate a simple application process that covers all their support schemes, including affordability and Priority Services.

CCW wanted to understand how this could be done so we agreed to conduct a pilot to co-design an application process with customers and expert stakeholders. We worked with Blue Marble research using a two-stage approach:

Stage 1

Understand customers' lived experiences and the current application process.

This included a desk-top review, in-depth interviews and group discussions with customers and stakeholders.

Stage 2

Co-design simple application processes.

We held an event to assess and co-design a variety of application options and understand customers' views on different support scheme names. Wessex Water staff, stakeholders and customers attended.

The pilot was really successful, and we published a set of principles for the design, language, images and process that other water companies can apply to their current application process. The insight will also inform the development of the application process for the single water affordability discount scheme.

Here are the key recommendations from the pilot:

Reducing barriers to customers when applying for support schemes

Communications

- Visuals should be relevant and relatable.
- Text should be succinct and informative.

- Language should be simple and easy to understand.
- Clearly outline resources.

Application process

- Be flexible by having a choice of channels to apply.
- Provide transparent information about the range of schemes.
- Provide a well-structured, but limited range of support schemes.
- A single application process to apply for all schemes.
- Limit the number of stages in the process.
- Quick and easy as possible.
- It's easy to provide evidence if required.
- Limit the involvement of 3rd parties.
- Integrate the PSR application within the application process for schemes.

Adopting the principles

To improve our current application process, have reviewed our imagery and language:

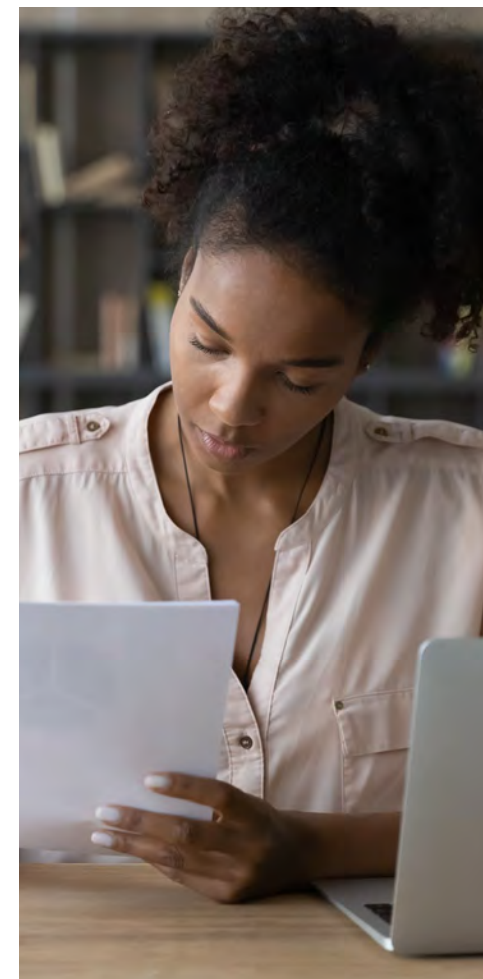
- on our website
- in literature
- on social media
- and in our broader advertising.

We have created an eligibility calculator on our website to direct customers to the right scheme for them. And we are building Priority Services information into all of our online self-service forms.

Common descriptions of schemes and tariffs are now in place across all water companies which helps customers and debt advice agencies alike. For example, they can now find the matching scheme for any water company when searching on a website.

You can find the full report on the resource page of our [PartnerHub website](#).

To improve our current application process, we have reviewed our imagery and language



Partnership with Kidney Care UK

We are always looking for new ways to reach people who could benefit from knowing more about what we do and how we can offer support with paying water bills and Priority Services. Bristol Water and Wessex Water joined up to form a partnership with Kidney Care UK in 2023. There are around 4,600 people in our combined supply areas who have had a kidney transplant or are on dialysis either in a hospital or at home.

As part of our partnership with Kidney Care UK both Bristol Water and Wessex Water have visited Southmead Hospital numerous times to meet dialysis patients and discuss affordability and Priority Services with them. Patients and staff have been amazing and made us feel so welcome on the ward and in the Richard Bright Satellite Unit. All visits have been enlightening showing what dialysis patients go through on a day-to-day basis, and why our support is so vital. On our last visit in late 2023, we met Susan, a customer of both Bristol Water and Wessex Water who we shared with you in Meet Eileen and Susan on page 49.

See our
case study
on page
49



We have visited
Southmead Hospital
to meet patients and
discuss affordability
and Priority Services

Customer research: putting our strategy to the test

No one is better placed than customers to tell us if our support services are meeting their needs. This is why we asked independent research agency, Blue Marble Research, to conduct a piece of research on our behalf.

Blue Marble convened a sample of 36 customers to participate in an in-depth interview which focused on key areas of the vulnerability strategy. Around half of the participants were already on one of our affordability schemes or receiving additional support by being on the Priority Services Register. This group could tell us if our services were meeting their needs. The other half of the sample were not currently receiving support - but Blue Marble were able to establish through their recruitment processes that they would be eligible to do so. We were particularly interested to hear the views of these customers and learn more about how we could reach them.

We learned the following from this research:

- 1 Participants feel that good experiences with their service providers are underpinned by the following aspects:

Staff interactions	Touchpoints & channels	Outputs & resolution
Positive interactions with specific customer service staff are a key driver of overall customer experience	Participants praise service providers who enable customers to contact them through a range of touchpoints and channels	All of the positive experiences that participants had with their service providers had good resolutions

- 2 However, participants feel that their service providers could provide even more for them in the following ways:

Proactive support	Streamlined information sharing	Additional communication channels
Many participants feel nervous, or embarrassed to reach out to service providers and ask for help, so want us to proactively reach out to them to offer support.	Participants do not want to have to reconfirm their vulnerabilities and personal information each time they speak with a different staff member	Many participants want to have even more ways to contact their service providers, including after-hours calling times, and options like video calling for neurodivergent customers

- 3 Participants told us they like the strategy, which they found very comprehensive - and were impressed (and often surprised) by the range of support services available. They found the principles of 'going the extra mile' and 'actively looking for signs of extra needs and requirements' especially important. Reassuringly the participants who are already being supported by us felt we were delivering against these ideals with lots of praise for our staff.



Most participants feel that we already live up to these four principles in practice. They also say that they are sensible and important parts of our service offering.

- 4 Participants also applauded the 2030 commitments set out in the strategy - particularly our use of social tariffs to ensure 'no one will be unable to afford their water bills.'
- 5 We also heard that customers want us to be even more ambitious with our plans to support customers in vulnerable circumstances - specifically that we could be bolder with some our targets e.g. reaching a higher number of customers eligible for a social tariff.
- 6 This research has also underlined the importance of engaging widely so that no one is missing out on help where it is needed. Participants told us we need more prominent communication of the support services available, reflecting their concern that they or others could be missing out through lack of awareness. They suggested a communications approach that includes:
 - an easy to navigate summary of all support services with signposting to more detailed information where needed

"It's encouraging - they have a strategy in place. I didn't realise as a company that they got all these things in the background. It's helped me understand them a bit better."

- better targeting of information, making it as easy as possible for the people most in need to get in touch or apply for help
- providing regular updates on services available so that no one is missing out because they are not aware of the support on offer.

To an extent, participants felt we do this already, but that we need to be deliver more consistent and concerted communications about our service to bolster awareness.

As a result of this research we have:

- added information on bogus caller protection to our strategy
- amended wording around support offered to parents of young children (from 12 months to 5 years) and changed our work stream 'Improving the customer journey' to 'Improving the customer experience'
- increased our target for raising awareness of both Priority Services and affordability support and made the wording of some of our commitments and aims much clearer
- added an initiative to work with supermarkets and hospitals
- reviewed our Priority Services web pages and added a customer facing summary of our strategy to improve communication about the support we offer.

In the future we plan to:

- consider more ways of raising awareness of the support we can provide
- produce a booklet or leaflet with our stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel aimed at those wanting a general overview of the strategy.

Find the [full research report](#) on our website.

Driving continuous improvement for those who need extra help

Proactively listening to feedback from our customers and learning from their positive and negative experience is critical to driving continuous improvement in the services we provide. By segmenting customers, we can compare the feedback from one group with another.

For example, in 2023-24 we received an average satisfaction score from customers on Priority Services of 8.89 out of 10. In addition, 90.9% said that we made it easy for them and 92.2% felt the matter was fully resolved.

This compares to an average score of 8.65 out of 10 from all other customers. 87.5% said that we made it easy, and 87.4% felt the matter was fully resolved.

Data from our C-MeX surveys also shows that customers on our affordability schemes are generally more satisfied with our billing

service than those that aren't.

We display and share data from our internal feedback and C-MeX surveys through data dashboards (real time where we can) to identify key themes, pain points and improvements we can make to training, processes, policies, and our systems.

We also undertake detailed customer journey mapping, adopting different customer personas including those on Priority Services and affordability schemes.

All of this insight and continuous improvement is overseen by our senior Customer Experience Group and our internal Vulnerability Advisory Panel (VAP). Vulnerability experts are best placed to ensure that improvements are made in the areas of the business that will have the biggest impact on our customers that need extra help.

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Wessex Water

Reviews 10,182 • Excellent



Trustpilot

Customer personas

Persona 1 - Janet

Janet is in her late 70s and is widowed, now living alone. She prefers to speak to someone in person and have things responded to in writing so she knows what is happening and can show it to her son if she needs help. Although she has an iPad, she doesn't like having to use the internet to search for information and worries about filling out on-line forms. She likes to be reassured and taken care of each step of the way.

Persona 2 - James

James is in his early 30s and leads a busy professional life. He's always on the go and prefers to use his mobile phone to communicate with companies. He wants things to be made accessible to him so that he can self-serve, provide information digitally at any time and move on waiting for the next update. He hates having to chase.

Persona 3 - Dylan

Dylan is in his early 40s. He has a long-standing medical condition but makes the most of life. He's tech-savvy and financially aware and seeks out various PSR schemes that will make his life easier. He has a small business he can run from home but is on low income support. He likes gadgets and has a few devices that make his life and communicating easier. He doesn't like having to re-disclose after registering his disability. He doesn't like using traditional communication methods.

Persona 4 - Navdeep

Navdeep is a happily married working mum with 2 children under 5. She is always busy running from pillar to post to juggle her job and family life. When things go wrong it's important to Navdeep to get help easily. She may use the website to find a phone number (unless she has a bill to hand) but she'd always pick up the phone to speak to a person. She likes a clear, non-technical experience and dislikes lots of phone options and hidden numbers.

"Quality and continuous improvement are of the highest importance to Wessex Water and the organisational culture is one of prioritising the customer experience. The work you do to expand your insight and constantly update your understanding of all your customers is extensive. At every opportunity you are seeking to reach those who are most disadvantaged for whatever reason of vulnerability."

**Customer service excellence
award report, 2023**

CASE STUDIES

SignLive

We have partnered with SignLive to provide new ways for customers who use British Sign Language (BSL) to contact our teams.

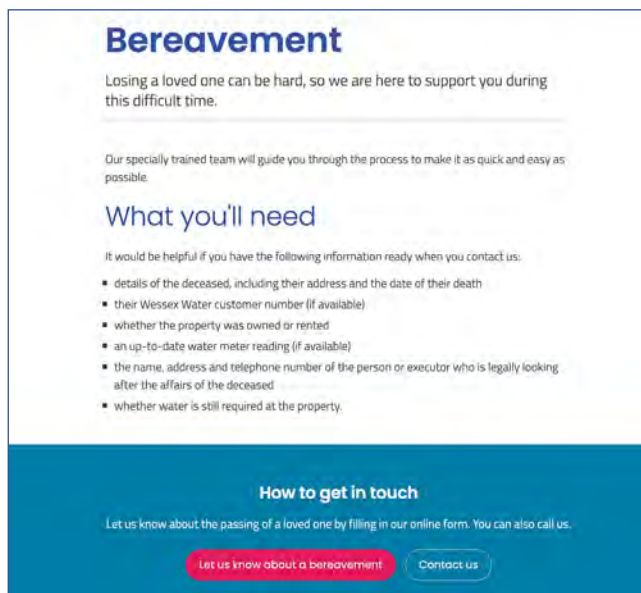
SignLive is a deaf-owned and deaf-led company that understands the needs of customers and is dedicated to removing barriers to communication for those who are deaf.

We can offer a free video relay service that connects the customer to a qualified online BSL interpreter. The interpreter will relay the conversation between the customer and a member of our team.

SignLive can also be used for face-to-face conversations with our teams if they need to visit a customer's home who uses BSL and can be easily accessed via a mobile app.



We can connect the customer to a qualified online BSL interpreter



Bereavement journey

We have been focusing on bereavement support for some time, adding promises to this strategy, supporting staff with training from Cruse, introducing a new bespoke website page, offering Live Chat, and signposting to organisations that can notify other companies and organisations about the death of a loved one from the same place.

More recently we have added Tell Us Once a service that lets you notify most government organisations in one go to our web page.

Following the publication of the paying fair guidelines, we introduced an online bereavement form, further reviewed our web pages, and developed a more formal internal written plan.

Find out more about [our bereavement support](#) on our website.

Our bereavement form is in the top four most popular billing web forms with around 300-400 customers using it every month.

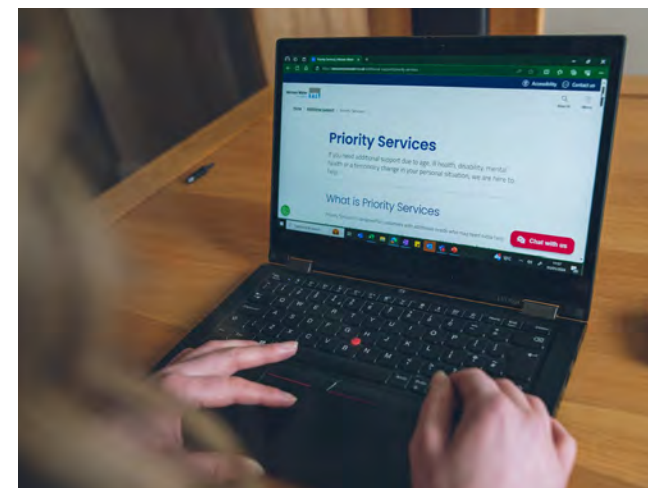
Shaw Trust - Improving our digital accessibility

We asked the charity Shaw Trust to review our website and online forms to make sure they are accessible and inclusive for all. Shaw Trust's team of pan-disabled experts carried out testing to highlight any accessibility barriers that might be present on our website and suggested solutions to provide more inclusive content.

Shaw Trust's review has helped us:

- make changes to website code and development making content more accessible for customers who use assistive technology, such as a screen reader
- include transcripts and user generated captions on all videos
- improve the structure and wording of content making it easier to read for customers with additional needs.

Our website is now fully WCAG 2.1 AA compliant, and we will continue to work on further changes to improve accessibility and customer experience.



Vulnerability strategy development timeline

Governance & Challenge	
Vulnerability Advisory Panel (VAP)	Customer Challenge Group (CCG)
The panel consists of stakeholder experts representing consumer bodies, government departments and CCW. The Panel supports, advises, and challenges our vulnerability strategy to make sure we are fulfilling our commitment to support and reach all our customers who need extra help and more recently that we comply with Ofwat’s Service for all and Paying fair guidance.	An independent body that plays a key role in representing the interests and needs of Wessex Water’s customers and provides advice and challenge on policy areas such as customer service, customer engagement, affordability, wider vulnerability, and tariffs. The co-chairs of the VAP are members of the CCG to provide that direct link between the two.

Continuous customer feedback on our services
Daily

Customer Insight		
Customer image tracker	Online panel: ‘Have Your Say’ customer survey and newsletter	Bespoke customer research
We continuously explore the views of 1,000 customers throughout each year gathering insight through interviews to understand perceived levels of satisfaction, sentiment, trust, and performance with Wessex Water as well as customers’ values and priorities. We track how customers are feeling about their financial situation and affording their water bills and their awareness of both our affordability support schemes and Priority Services. Results are analysed using six customer segments including ‘stretched and struggling’.	Running three times a year since 2013, registered customers are surveyed on a range of topics including customer priorities and social tariffs. A newsletter is published to share findings and changes we’re making as a result and to signpost customers to relevant information. The panel is also used as a separate sample in research projects to inform business plans.	Specific research projects to inform this strategy or our services for those who need extra help. Find out more about these research materials and detailed findings on our website.

We continuously explore the views of 1,000 customers throughout each year



Timeline and key milestones for developing this strategy

2005/06	
Onboarded debt advice agencies to carry out holistic assessments and determine ability to pay of customer struggling with their bills and debt. Funding of debt advice agencies commenced.	
2007	
February	Annual debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
April	Launched low-rate tariff, Assist following extensive engagement with debt advice partners on operation of the tariff
2008	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
2009	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
2010	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
2011	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
July	Eligibility criteria for social tariffs research Stakeholder workshop and 14 focus group discussions to understand attitudes to social tariffs and the key eligibility criteria. Changes to the Assist tariff developed ready for quantitative testing.
2012	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
October	Cross-subsidy social tariff acceptability research Telephone survey of 400 domestic customers to understand attitudes and acceptability of our social tariff proposals and the willingness to pay extra to fund them. Although most customers do not support the principle of cross subsidy and the idea that customers should fund social tariffs, three quarters of customers were willing to accept the small, proposed bill increase of 50p per year. On balance, customers agreed with the qualifying criteria for Assist but were divided on the proposals to lower the WaterSure cap from the average domestic bill to the average metered bill.

2013	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
April	Re-launched Assist tariff with amended eligibility criteria Tariff relaunched. Eligibility widened to anyone who couldn't afford to pay their bill such as those in low paid work. Tariff no longer limited to those on benefits.
April	Launched Watersure Plus WaterSure Plus introduced enhancing the current WaterSure government led scheme. Bill cap set in line with the average metered bill (more information on page 62).
October	Affordability Advisory Group established Group set up to oversee our affordability support and identify ways to improve uptake. Key role to monitor and agree the level of cross subsidy. The group agreed that our Assist tariff and wider "TAP" offering are best in class. Group to meet annually in June/July.
2014	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
July	Affordability Advisory Group meeting
2015	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
July	Affordability Advisory Group meeting
November	Social tariff acceptability research Following a proposal from the Affordability Advisory Group, a survey of 433 customers is conducted to understand attitudes to the proposal to offer low-income pensioners a discount of 20% on their water bills and to measure the acceptability of the anticipated cross subsidy. Just under 60% find the pension credit social tariff acceptable. Over half of customers, in principle, would find a bill increase of between £4-£6 acceptable to fund the cross subsidy.
2016	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
April	Pension credit discount scheme for low-income pensioners launched
July	People in vulnerable circumstances research 1-2-1 discussions with 10 stakeholder organisations providing services to potentially vulnerable customers i.e., debt advice, housing associations, elderly and mental health support. Organisations happy to engage and find a way to support us in our business plan research and engagement activities. Principles developed for engaging with people in vulnerable circumstances over the course of the research for the business plan.
July	Affordability Advisory Group meeting

2017	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshops Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
June	Affordability Advisory Group meeting
August	Published first 'supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances' policy
2018	
February	Stakeholder survey with advice agencies and follow-up workshops Online partner surveys to seek feedback on the value and effectiveness of our partnerships, support for customers in vulnerable circumstances and ideas for improvement to our partnerships and customer offering. 27 responses received showing overwhelmingly positive feedback with 95% happy with the way we work with them including accessibility of our staff and our offering for customers in vulnerable circumstances. Findings presented at annual workshops with the advice agencies to co-create improvements to our vulnerability strategy subsequently known as Every Customer Matters.
March	Evaluating Priority Services research 20 in-home, paired in-depth interviews with vulnerable customers to evaluate Priority Services, half registered for the scheme and half not registered but eligible plus a 90-minute group discussion with four vulnerable customers living in an area recently affected by a water supply interruption. Overall, strong endorsement for the scheme, noting a range of recommendations to further enhance it, drive awareness and increase up take. Ideas fed into development of vulnerability strategy.
April	Launched Assist for organisations Scheme enabling not-for-profit organisations to pass bill discounts on to vulnerable young adults (more information on page 62).
July	Affordability Advisory Group review strategy for customers in vulnerable circumstances ready for submission as part of the 2020-25 business plan.
September	Every Customer Matters strategy first published
2019	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
May	Joint event with Scottish and Southern Electricity networks To raise awareness of Priority Services with multiple common partners and encourage them to sign up to work with us.
July	Affordability Advisory Group agreed to extend their remit from just financial vulnerability to all aspects of vulnerability. Agreed to recruit new members
October	Published updated Every Customer Matters strategy & performance report
2020	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
July	Affordability Advisory Group re launched as Vulnerability Advisory Panel New remit agreed and members to support the reporting of vulnerability performance linked to business plan commitments.
September	Co-creative research: to increase uptake of pension credit discount Co-creative research workshops with 10 eligible pensioners (not in receipt of pension credit tariff) to understand how we can increase uptake and explore new messaging that could be used across customer communications. Research resulted in a name change to 'Discount for Low-Income Pensioners', a simplified application process, and changes to promotional messaging.

2020 (continued)	
September	Published updated Every Customer Matters strategy & performance report
November	Launched Covid Assist Working with our debt advice partners we co-created Covid Assist. The tariff provided temporary support to customers directly financially impacted by the pandemic to help them get back on track, retain a habit of paying and avoid building up unnecessary debt (more information on page 62).
2021	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
March	Joint event with National Grid and Bristol Water To raise awareness of Priority Services with multiple common partners and encourage them to sign up to work with us.
July	Vulnerability Advisory Panel strengthens link with our Customer Challenge Group (CCG) Provides additional challenge on vulnerability and affordability. Co-chairs appointed for VAP from CCG.
September	Water bill accessibility testing with Scope Scope experts review our customer bills to improve accessibility and customer experience with several recommendations implemented (see case study on page 47).
September	Published updated Every Customer Matters strategy and performance report
2022	
February	Support schemes pilot Two-stage research to firstly understand customers' lived experiences and the current application processes through desk-based reviews, in-depth customer interviews, multiple group discussions with 38 eligible customers not currently on support schemes, and individual in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders. Building on this, stage two involved a co-creation workshop with Wessex Water customers, staff, and stakeholders to design a simple application process (see case study on page 50).
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
June	Vulnerability Advisory Panel increases frequency of meetings following increased link with Customer Challenge Group
September	Water bill accessibility testing with Scope Partnership working to test water bills accessibility through in-depth user interviews with adults with low vision or sight impairments', and with neurodivergent adults and/or those with mental health challenges (see case study on page 47).
September	Published updated Every Customer Matters strategy & performance report
December	Vulnerability Advisory Panel meeting
2023	
February	Annual funded debt advice partner workshop Workshops with all funded debt advice partners to discuss operation of our support schemes including any changes, ideas for improvement, funding and partnership working.
June	Social tariff acceptability research 807 customers surveys highlighting that almost three-quarters of customers are willing to contribute towards additional cross-subsidy for social tariffs for the period 2025-30, however, customers do express concerns around the cost of living and bill affordability both now and in the future. Over two-thirds of customers are aware of Priority Services.

2023 (continued)	
July	Vulnerability Advisory Panel meeting
September	Affordability and acceptability testing of the business plan 96 customer interviews and 2373 customers surveys revealed that despite the cost-of-living crisis, only a minority (10%) of customers find it difficult to afford their current water and sewerage bill. However, for the proposed future bills, the proportion who will find it difficult to afford jumps to over 4 in 10. Customers were surprised by the extent of the bill increases. Overall, 63% of customers accept the proposed plans. Lack of acceptance of the plans for PR24 revolves around the (linked) issues of the cost of the plan and a (growing) sense that water companies' profits are too high, and that they should be paying for more of the investments.
September	Published updated Every Customer Matters strategy & performance report
December	Vulnerability Advisory Panel meeting
2024	
February	Funded debt advice partner workshop & partner survey Joint workshops with Bristol Water, Bournemouth Water and South West Water. Sessions were well attended with partners very engaged and positive about our relationship. Group discussions focus on our Every Customer Matters strategy covering topics such as bill increases, cost-of-living, and water company performance. Following the workshop, we invited approximately 200 partners to also share feedback on our strategy. Overall, positive feedback and suggestions received, with our partners happy with our approach and feeling that it is very comprehensive.
April	Vulnerability Advisory Panel makes changes to meeting frequency and format Better aligns with annual reporting and review of our vulnerability strategy, Every Customer Matters
June	Research to test the vulnerability strategy with customers 36 in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of customers who need extra help for varying needs. Some customers were already on PSR and some were eligible but not yet on the scheme. The range of support available to customers outlined in our strategy, as well as the principles, workstreams, and service area promises, are seen as impressive, comprehensive, and achievable. Customers feel these aspects highlight the level of thought put into the strategy, and many feel that we are already living up to much of the strategy in practice. The 2030 commitments (including the Priority Service Register commitments) are seen as important goals, with most customers viewing these as achievable and appropriate. Overall, our strategy is well-received (see case study on page 52).
June	Vulnerability Advisory Panel meeting to review and sign off vulnerability strategy for submission to Ofwat

The success of TAP

Reduced bill - Assist

Assist was our first main social tariff and the first in the water industry. It was introduced in 2007 as a “win-win” tariff because at that time cross subsidies for social tariffs were not allowed. Eligibility was restricted to customers in receipt of means tested benefits.

Following social tariff legislation and extensive customer and stakeholder consultation into both eligibility and customer support for any associated cross subsidy, eligibility was reassessed. In April 2013 Assist was opened to customers in low paid work so in effect anyone who cannot afford to pay their bill could apply for the tariff.

Assist has six bands, and the customer is placed on the band closest to their ability to pay. Bill discounts are up to 90%. The average bill reduction for customers on the Assist tariff is around £290, while these customers continue to contribute on average £50 more than they did before, which is more than the cost of administering the tariff.

Bill cap scheme - WaterSure

In April 2013 we introduced WaterSure Plus. Eligibility criteria for WaterSure are set by government but we enhanced our scheme by reducing the annual bill to bring it in line with the average metered bill rather than the average domestic bill.

Discount for low income pensioners

In April 2016 following further consultation with our customers and stakeholders we introduced our Pension Credit Discount offering low income pensioners, the ‘just about managing’, up to 20% off their bills. Our Affordability Advisory Group was fundamental to the introduction of this discount having seen the low numbers of pensioners on our affordability schemes at that point in time. Eligibility for this discount is linked entirely to receipt of Pension Credit or where state pension is the only income. The average bill reduction is around £55.

In 2020 we commissioned research with pensioners and charity partners to identify barriers to take up of the discount and ways we could improve accessibility. This led to the change in name, simplification of the application process and changes to promotional messaging.

Assist for organisations

In April 2018 we introduced ‘Assist for organisations’ having been approached by a charity that houses younger adults moving out of the care system. Assist is now available to those not-for-profit organisations so they can pass bill discounts on to these young adults who need extra help.

Debt Support Scheme - Restart

In addition, we offer customers help to repay their debt and get back on track through our Restart programme. Restart rewards the customer for paying their bill and importantly leads to a change in behaviour. In year one the customer pays their current year charges and any notional contribution towards their debt and we write off an equivalent amount. In year two the customer again pays their current year charges plus any notional amount towards their debt and then we clear the remaining balance, however large. At the end of the two years the customer is back on track with more than 89% continuing to engage and pay their ongoing water charges.

Payment breaks, flexible payment plans and Water Direct - using benefits payments

For those who just need a short-term solution we have a range of flexible payment plans or the offer of a payment break. This has been particularly useful as a stop gap for customers applying for benefits who will then move on to a low-rate tariff or for those waiting for Universal Credit to be awarded. We also continue to offer Water Direct.

Water-metering and Home Check

Some customers simply find a water meter can lead to a more manageable bill. To encourage switching to a meter, we are the first company to introduce a cash back guarantee for our customers, designed by our Young People’s Panel. For metered customers, we also

offer a Home Check service to help them reduce their water and energy use.

Covid Assist

In 2020, we worked with our debt advice partners and expert advisers to co-create Covid Assist. The tariff provided temporary support to customers directly impacted financially by the pandemic helping them get back on track, retain a habit of paying and avoid building up unnecessary debt. It also made sure we refer the right customers to our debt advice partners at the right time. Intelligent triaging fast tracked bill discounts of up to 90% to eligible customers for six months after which they could apply for our standard Assist tariff for longer term support.

Cost of living Crisis

Due to the cost of living crisis we adapted Assist further to make it easier for customers to access lower water bills and give the debt advice sector longer to carry out a holistic assessment of their ability to pay.

At the first point of contact we will immediately put customers on Assist Level 4 (around 50% bill reduction).

Customers will still be asked to seek independent advice.

If they don’t seek advice and complete an application for help (including a standard financial statement) within a year, we will revert them to standard charges. If the assessment shows the customer needs a larger discount, their Assist Level will be adjusted and backdated.

Care Leavers Assist

Working with South Gloucestershire Council we introduced care leavers Assist. This gives a 90% bill reduction to young people leaving care and becoming bill payers for the first time. We are hoping to roll it out to other council areas.

Compliance with Service for All

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
1.1	Companies should adapt their services to customers in line with any known extra help needs. This is especially important during times where there is increased risk of harm; for example, during incidents.	Compliant	<p>Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Continuous improvement - pages 8 and 53 Tailored services provided to those who need extra help - pages 12 - 21 Compensation - page 22 Incident management - page 23 Endorsement - page 24 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37</p> <p>In summary, we deliver a full range of flexible, tailored additional services through Priority Services and our Tailored Assistance Programme (TAP), co-designed and endorsed by organisations and stakeholders representing customers who need extra help. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of bottled water during a break in the water supply. We will call customers to check if this is needed and plan any breaks in the water supply around customers' medical needs. We will also look at wider support if customers are out of water for any length of time. • Communication and bills in a different format or language, that is jargon free and written in plain English. • A variety of ways for customers to get in touch. These include our Live Chat service, dedicated language line, sign language translation, and Text Relay. • Additional meter readings and free relocation of the meter if needed. • Knock and wait or password service if we visit a customer in their home. • A carer, friend, or family member to liaise with us on a customer's behalf. We encourage our customers to set up a Power of Attorney where appropriate. • Low-rate tariffs and schemes to reduce ongoing water bills and repay debt as well as practical advice around water and energy use. Our teams will signpost to these schemes at every opportunity. <p>Although our support is tailored to the individual, we have set out the extra help we might typically give to certain customer groups and actions we will take to best support them. Customers may fall into more than one group.</p> <p>We provide extensive support during any incidents such as an unexpected break in the water supply. Our Customer Care Team contact all customers on Priority Services to let them know, find out what extra help they might need e.g. bottled water delivery, and keep in touch with them throughout. We use a priority rating to contact those most at risk of harm first. We also have a dedicated incident management page on our website which provides essential information such as how we will keep customers updated, their bottled water rights, and entitlement to compensation.</p> <p>We operate a fast, warm voice answer and all call agents are highly trained to support customers on Priority Services or identify customers who need extra help. In general, target times for dealing with issues at individual properties are the same for all customers but we always take individual circumstances into account. In some cases, our policies explicitly provide additional support for customers on Priority Services. For example, we offer a free leak repair on customers' own supply pipes with eligibility linked to pipe length. If a customer is not eligible, we will still fix their leak for free if they are on Priority Services or one of our social tariffs.</p> <p>We continually improve our service using insight from customers, organisations, partners and stakeholders. We try new ways of working. We have included a range of initiatives past, present, and future in this strategy to raise awareness, increase uptake, and improve the customer experience.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather other feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects, and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, including incidents, adopting different customer personas. 4 Measure the number of customers on Priority Services that our Customer Care Team attempts to contact during an incident as a proportion of the total number of customers on Priority Services that are affected. 5 Continue to use insight from stakeholders, organisations and partners to co-design the extra help we will give to our customers and increase the number of organisations willing to endorse our strategy. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p> <p>Attempt to contact 100% customers on Priority Services who are affected during an incident to check if they need bottled water delivered or any additional support</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
1.2	Companies should ensure that the level and nature of support available to customers is presented in a way customers can understand.	Compliant	<p>Accessible services - page 6 Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Compensation - page 22 Incident management - page 23 Warm welcome - page 23 Case studies - pages 47, 48, 52 and 54</p> <p>In summary, we are committed to making our services accessible for everyone. Information on the services we provide through Priority Services is published in a variety of formats and through a variety of media, such as on bills, in dedicated leaflets, our website, and social media. We promote Priority Services via our wide range of partners. We have a dedicated website for partners https://partnerhub.wessexwater.co.uk</p> <p>Once registered for Priority Services, a customer receives a welcome letter to confirm they are on our Register and the extra help they will receive from us.</p> <p>Through Priority Services we provide additional methods of communication such as Relay UK text service, an interpreter through language line, and a nominee service. During any emergency, such as a break in the water supply, our Customer Care Team support customers throughout, whatever their chosen method of contact. We have a dedicated incident management page on our website which provides essential information such as how we will keep customers updated, their bottled water rights, and entitlement to compensation.</p> <p>We design and test services with customers in mind and are continuing to explore further options to work with customers who have lived experience of vulnerability.</p> <p>We take account of the guidance of organisations on the accessibility of the information we provide and have worked with the Money Advice Trust, disability charity Scope, the Business Disability Forum, Wiltshire Mind, Quids In and the Shaw Trust to review our bills, leaflets, and website. Case studies are included in the strategy.</p> <p>We have improved the accessibility of our own sites, maximising the potential of green spaces.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Use external accreditations to ensure our services are meeting the needs of our customers and are considered best practice. This will include the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision, BS18477, the new ISO 22458:2022 Consumer Vulnerability and the Customer Service Excellence award which we have held since 1996. 2 Continue to work with the Shaw Trust to improve our digital accessibility. 3 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 4 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, including incidents, adopting different customer personas. 5 Continue to use insight from stakeholders, organisations and partners to co-design the extra help we will give to our customers and increase the number of organisations willing to endorse our strategy. 6 Explore the use of a lived experience panel when creating new services or testing existing ones. We will either create our own panel or draw on other established ones. 	Not applicable	<p>Achieve ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability by 2030</p> <p>Maintain the Customer Service Excellence award</p> <p>Comply with WCAG 2.1 AA</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
1.3	Companies should seek to continuously improve the service they provide to customers who need extra help. This may include finding innovative ways to design or implement services.	Exceeding	<p>Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel - pages 3 and 5 Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Endorsement - page 24 Four workstreams - page 25 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Continuous improvement - page 8 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Case study - page 53</p> <p>In summary, we have had a vulnerability strategy in place since 2018 and year on year it has evolved to meet changing needs and expectations.</p> <p>We have four very well established workstreams, with a wealth of innovative initiatives in each, to maximise awareness, increase uptake of the extra help we provide and improve the customer experience. All initiatives, past, present, and future are mapped to the Service for All guidance. Each year we have used case studies to showcase our work. Previous versions of this strategy can be found on our website https://corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/document-library</p> <p>We hold several external accreditations including the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision and the Customer Service Excellence Award, and we regularly benchmark our service within and outside the industry. We are a member of several local and national vulnerability forums allowing us to champion the needs of our water customers and identify best practice and new ideas.</p> <p>We use feedback from customers, partners, organisations, and stakeholders to drive continuous improvement. Our service offering and overall strategy has been co-designed and endorsed by organisations representing customers who need extra help, and our overall approach overseen by our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel.</p> <p>Proactively listening to feedback from our customers and learning from their positive and negative experiences is critical. By segmenting customers, we compare the feedback from one group with another. Detailed customer journey mapping and analysing internal and external satisfaction survey data in real-time where we can, allows us to identify key themes, pain points, and improvements we can make to training, processes, policies, and our systems.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Use external accreditations to ensure our services are meeting the needs of our customers and are considered best practice. This will include the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision, BS18477, the new ISO 22458:2022 Consumer Vulnerability and the Customer Service Excellence award which we have held since 1996. 4 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, adopting different customer personas. 5 Explore the use of a lived experience panel when creating new services or testing existing ones. We will either create our own panel or draw on other established ones. 6 Introduce a satisfaction survey to seek the views of our 300 plus partners. 7 Continue to involve customers, partners, organisations and stakeholders in the co-creation of our services and this strategy as a whole. It will continue to be overseen by our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p> <p>Achieve ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability by 2030</p> <p>Maintain the Customer Service Excellence Award</p> <p>>85% of our partners are satisfied with our service</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
1.4	Companies should use a range of data to monitor the effectiveness of their extra help services, and the satisfaction levels of customers who have made such needs known.	Compliant	<p>Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel - pages 3 and 5 Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Continuous improvement - page 8 Endorsement - page 24 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Case study - page 53</p> <p>In summary, we use data to monitor the effectiveness of our strategy and customer satisfaction in a variety of ways. Proactively listening to feedback from our customers and learning from their positive and negative experiences is critical. By segmenting customers, we compare the feedback from one group with another. Detailed customer journey mapping and analysing internal and external satisfaction survey data in real-time where we can, allows us to identify key themes, pain points, and improvements to training, processes, policies, and our systems. We use contact and complaints data including extensive root cause analysis to identify areas we can improve and we map those end-to-end journeys with lower levels of satisfaction using a variety of customer personas.</p> <p>We have engaged directly with customers through specific research and co-creation projects on ways to improve Priority Services and simplify access to support. More recently we asked customers for their views on this strategy as a whole as well as satisfaction with the support we offer.</p> <p>Our vulnerability strategy, complaints action plan and overall continuous improvement programme are overseen by our senior Customer Experience Group. Our internal Vulnerability Advisory Panel and team of Vulnerability Experts ensure improvements are made in the areas of the business that will have the biggest impact on our customers. Our overall strategy is overseen by our expert Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel which has a direct link into our Customer Challenge Group.</p> <p>We hold several external accreditations including the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision and the Customer Service Excellence Award and we regularly benchmark our service within and outside the industry. We are a member of several local and national vulnerability forums which allows us to champion the needs of our water customers and share best practice and new ideas. Our strategy has been endorsed by a range of organisations and we have multiple partnerships in place to both help us deliver the strategy and evolve it further.</p> <p>We take account of a wide range of external data and research and aim to comply with best practice guidance from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the industry regulator, Ofwat • the customer watchdog, CCW • UK Regulators Network • Office of the Public Guardian • other industry regulators such as OFGEM, OFCOM, FCA • Citizens Advice • companies providing excellent customer service outside our industry. 	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Use external accreditations to ensure our services are meeting the needs of our customers and are considered best practice. This will include the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision, BS18477, the new ISO 22458:2022 Consumer Vulnerability and the Customer Service Excellence award which we have held since 1996. 4 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, adopting different customer personas. 5 Undertake specific research with Priority Services customers, or specialist organisations representing them, to understand their expectations for complaint management and how these might differ. We will make changes, where necessary, to improve the journey for complainants. 6 Introduce a satisfaction survey to seek the views of our 300 plus partners whom we work with. 7 Continue to involve customers, partners, organisations and stakeholders in the co-creation of our services and this strategy as a whole. It will continue to be overseen by our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p> <p>Achieve ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability by 2030</p> <p>Maintain the Customer Service Excellence Award</p> <p>>85% of our partners are satisfied with our service</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
2.1	Companies should interact with customers in a way that is inclusive for a diverse range of audiences. This should be underpinned by relevant insights, which may include research, engagement and accreditation.	Compliant	<p>Spotting the signs - page 7 Inclusive services - page 8 Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Commitments - pages 9, 11, 29, and 46 Endorsement - page 24 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Case studies - pages 46, 47, 52 and 54</p> <p>In summary, our staff are highly trained and empowered to spot signs of vulnerability and go the extra mile. We are committed to delivering customer care that is tailored, inclusive, and accessible.</p> <p>We make sure our communications are jargon free and written in plain English. We take account of the guidance of organisations on the accessibility and inclusivity of the information we provide and have worked with the Money Advice Trust, disability charity Scope, the Business Disability Forum, Wiltshire Mind, Quids In and the Shaw Trust to review our bills, leaflets, and website. Case studies are included in the strategy.</p> <p>Our service offering, including communication, has been co-designed and endorsed by organisations representing customers. In this strategy, we have set out the extra help we might typically give to certain customer groups and actions we will take to best support them.</p> <p>We use Recite Me on our website, and following an accessibility audit by a team of experienced pan-disabled testers at the Shaw Trust, we are committed to making improvements across all our web forms to make them accessible for all. Improvements are being made to our website and online forms to become fully WCAG 2.1 AA compliant.</p> <p>We have engaged directly with customers, partners, organisations and stakeholders through specific research and co-creation projects on ways to improve Priority Services and simplify access to support. All feedback is used to drive continuous improvement.</p> <p>We hold several external accreditations including the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision and the Customer Service Excellence Award, and we regularly benchmark our service within and outside the industry. We are a member of several local and national vulnerability forums which allows us to share best practice and new ideas around communication.</p> <p>We have worked with organisations such as the Bristol Somali Resource Centre to support customers struggling to pay, help with language or cultural barriers and educate our staff through awareness raising sessions.</p> <p>We are committed to being a Dementia Friendly organisation with all staff trained as Dementia Friends. We have a Gold Award from the Bristol Dementia Action Alliance for our work.</p> <p>We have a commitment to the Keep Me Posted campaign and Partner Status from Stop Loan Sharks. We previously held the Louder than Word charter mark and although this is no longer run by the RNID, we still work closely with them.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Use external accreditations to ensure our services are meeting the needs of our customers and are considered best practice. This will include the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision, BS18477, the new ISO 22458:2022 Consumer Vulnerability and the Customer Service Excellence award which we have held since 1996. 4 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, adopting different customer personas. 5 Undertake specific research with Priority Services customers, or specialist organisations representing them, to understand their experience and drive continuous improvement. 6 Continue to work with the Shaw Trust to improve our digital accessibility. 7 Introduce a satisfaction survey to seek the views of our 300 plus partners. 8 Continue to involve customers, partners, organisations and stakeholders in the co-creation of our services and this strategy as a whole. It will continue to be overseen by our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel. 9 Explore the use of a lived experience panel when creating new services or testing existing ones. We will either create our own panel or draw on other established ones. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p> <p>Achieve ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability</p> <p>Maintain the Customer Service Excellence Award</p> <p>Comply with WCAG 2.1 AA</p> <p>>85% of our partners are satisfied with our service</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
2.2	Companies should offer their customers a range of ways to interact and communicate. This includes allowing customers to opt for third party billing where appropriate.	Compliant	<p>Accessible services and communication - pages 6, 7 and 12 Inclusive services - page 8 Tailored services provided to those who need extra help - pages 12 - 21 Incident management - page 23 Commitments - pages 9, 11, 29, and 46 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Case studies - pages 46, 50 and 54</p> <p>In summary, we offer customers a range of channels to interact and communicate with us. We also offer several specific communication options through Priority Services, including large print, Braille, a language other than English, and a nominee or third party to interact with us on behalf of the customer. We have a bespoke web page helping customers understand how they can appoint someone to manage their account https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/additional-support/appointing-someone-to-manage-your-account</p> <p>Customers communicate with us through their channel of choice and we make sure we use their preferred channel in our proactive communication e.g., during a break in the water supply. Our Customer Care Team also directly support customers on Priority Services during such incidents. We also offer additional ways to interact with us such as SignLive, subtitled video, translation service, Recite Me and Google translate.</p> <p>We offer a range of support to those going through bereavement including an online form for customers to tell us about the death of a loved one.</p> <p>Customers can sign up for Priority Services through a range of channels e.g., telephone (including Language Line, SignLive and Relay UK), Live Chat, web form, email, and paper. Customers can also sign up via a third-party organisation, through a data share, a call from our Customer Care team following a face-to-face visit at their property, an application for one of our social tariffs, debt repayment schemes or WaterSure. We prompt customers to sign up following the completion of any web form.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Undertake detailed customer journey mapping, including incidents, adopting different customer personas. 4 Measure the number of customers on Priority Services that our Customer Care Team attempts to contact during an incident as a proportion of the total number of customers on Priority Services that are affected. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p> <p>Attempt to contact 100% customers on Priority Services affected during an incident to check if they need bottled water delivered or any additional support</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
2.3	Companies should consult with CCW, and engage with stakeholders and other customer representatives, when making significant changes to their proposed service offering around vulnerability.	Exceeding	<p>Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel - pages 3 and 5 Co-design and development of the strategy - page 8 and Appendix I Endorsement - pages 4 and 24 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Continuous improvement - page 8 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Case study - pages 50 and 53</p> <p>In summary, our expert Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel (VAP) oversees our work in this area. They support, advise, and challenge our Vulnerability Strategy to ensure we are fulfilling our commitment to reach all our customers. Along with our partners, organisations and wider stakeholders, they have helped co-create the services we offer to their specific client groups on Priority Services and identified ways to raise awareness and increase take-up of our support, improve the customer experience and the effectiveness of our partnerships.</p> <p>CCW is a member of our Stakeholder VAP and independent Customer Challenge Group (CCG) and we consult with them about any significant changes to customer policies, processes, and services. CCW have provided a quote in our strategy. We worked directly with CCW on understanding what a simple application process would look like as part of their affordability review.</p> <p>Our vulnerability strategy has been in place since 2018 and year on year it has evolved to meet changing needs and expectations. It is co-designed with and endorsed by our partners, organisations, and stakeholders as well as customers.</p> <p>We have worked with customers and stakeholders to improve our service offering and showcase our work through case studies. Previous versions of our strategy are on our website https://corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/document-library.</p> <p>We ask organisations who represent customers to attend our internal Vulnerability Advisory Panel meetings with our Vulnerability Experts. This helps with staff training and gives valuable insight to help us improve the customer experience. Our policy team work with other areas of the business such as our wellbeing team, disability working group, race at work group, and social mobility group to share partnerships, resources, and experience, including lived experience.</p> <p>For 2024 we are looking at ways to engage even further with customers who have lived experience either through a lived experience panel or inviting customers to our Stakeholder VAP to share their stories.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Continue to learn from, explore best practice, and directly involve our partner organisations and stakeholders and companies inside and outside the sector, in the ongoing development of our support for customers who need extra help. 2 Review, update and publish our strategy each year overseen by our expert Stakeholder Advisory Panel. 3 Continue to engage with CCW and other stakeholders about any significant changes to policies, processes, and publications relating to customers who need extra help. 	Not applicable	Numeric targets not applicable.

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
3.1	"Companies should take active steps to identify customers who require extra help who have not yet been identified."	Exceeding	<p>Ethos and values - page 4 Going the extra mile - page 6 Spotting the signs - page 7 Four workstreams - page 25 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Case studies - 46, 49 and 51</p> <p>In summary, our staff are trained and empowered to spot the signs of vulnerability and go the extra mile for customers. Having designed our services to improve the experience of customers who need extra help, we know it's critical to maximise awareness, increase uptake and improve the customer experience. In 2013, working with our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel, we set up four workstreams to meet these goals and have a wealth of past, present, and future initiatives under each of these workstreams.</p> <p>Growing partnerships is vital to help us identify customers who need extra help. We work with over 300 partners in whichever way suits them from providing advice to customers and promoting our support through to data sharing and direct referral onto our schemes. Our partners also advise us on our services and endorse our strategy.</p> <p>We work collaboratively on projects with other stakeholders or organisations often alongside energy Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) or other water companies e.g., sponsored a Priority Services champion at Citizens Advice Dorset, worked with the Centre for Sustainable Energy to understand how we can better work with the health sector, and more recently started a project with Kidney Care UK to reach and better support those with chronic kidney disease.</p> <p>When customers register for Priority Services, their information is recorded on our systems so we can tailor the service we provide. Our teams are trained to spot and respond to any signs of vulnerability and proactively sign customers up to Priority Services where relevant.</p> <p>We have data-sharing agreements in place with energy DNOs such as National Grid Energy Distribution, local councils, and fire services and we are expanding this to energy suppliers this year. We share and receive data for those customers who need to be on Priority Services. We are supporting Northumbrian Water's Support for All project and the national data sharing initiative through Water UK.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers if they are aware of Priority Services through our ongoing image tracking survey of 2,000 customers across our region. We will also compare our results with CCW's Water Matters research. 2 Increase the reach of Priority Services across our region growing the number of customers on our register over time. 3 Increase the number of data shares we have with organisations such as local councils and fire services. 4 Introduce a satisfaction survey to seek the views of our 300 plus partners. 5 Continue to extend the range of initiatives we have to increase uptake of our support. We will develop and fund additional joint projects with partners such as local authorities, housing and social care providers, charities and foodbanks, building on lessons learned from previous projects. 	Not applicable	<p>>65% of bill payers are aware of Priority Services by 2030</p> <p>Around 290,000 households on Priority Services by 2030</p> <p>>85% of our partners are satisfied with our service</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
3.2	Companies should take steps to proactively increase customer awareness of the extra help available to those who need it.	Exceeding	<p>Spotting the signs - page 7 Four workstreams - page 25 Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Case studies - 43 - 44, 49 and 51</p> <p>In summary, we know it's critical to maximise awareness of our support and increase uptake. In 2013, working with our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel, we set up four workstreams to meet these goals and have a wealth of past, present, and future initiatives under each of these workstreams.</p> <p>We have data-sharing agreements in place with energy Distribution Network Operators, local councils, and fire services. We share and receive data for those customers who need to be on Priority Services.</p> <p>Each year our promotional activities for Priority Services typically involve a mixture of paid-for promotion and social media advertising linked to external awareness weeks and campaigns, working with partners, and utilising every touch point we have with our customers. Examples can be seen throughout our strategy but include front of bill messages, welcome packs, customer magazine, e-newsletter, website, leaflets, welcome packs, letters about operational work, flyers at community events and then pharmacy bags, petrol pumps, hospital magazines, tenant packs, bespoke flyers, partner websites or social media and radio adverts. We also use case studies such as Susan. Sometimes external factors drive more tailored activities such as during the pandemic.</p> <p>We run internal news stories to encourage and raise awareness with our staff and their friends and families.</p> <p>Our teams, including contact centre, back office, and front line, are trained to spot and respond to any signs of vulnerability and proactively promote and sign customers up to Priority Services and/or affordability where relevant. We signpost to Priority Services at the end of web forms, during water quality checks, lead pipe replacement, Home Check water efficiency visits, winter ready home visits and sewer misuse engagement. We have Priority Services and Spotting the signs of vulnerability e-Learning modules that are mandatory to complete.</p> <p>We encourage our partners to promote our services and provide promotional resources for them to use via PartnerHub such as zap banners, flyers, and posters. We train our partners on all our support schemes. Our funded debt advice partners can access additional funding if they actively promote and sign customers up to Priority Services.</p> <p>We have recently launched a new community outreach service, with two co-ordinators running drop-in and appointment sessions across our region.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers if they are aware of Priority Services through our ongoing image tracking survey of 2,000 customers across our region. We will also compare our results with CCW's Water Matters research. 2 Increase the reach of Priority Services across our region growing the number of customers on our register over time. 3 Attend customer events in the community and run awareness sessions with our partners each year. 4 Increase the number of data shares we have with organisations such as local councils and fire services. 5 Continue to extend the range of initiatives we have to raise awareness of our support. We will develop and fund additional joint projects with partners such as local authorities, housing and social care providers, charities and foodbanks, building on lessons learned from previous projects. 6 Continue to fund a variety of environmental and community projects through the Wessex Water Foundation, focusing on schemes that are proven to be effective and innovative. 	Not applicable	<p>>65% of bill payers are aware of Priority Services by 2030</p> <p>Around 290,000 households on Priority Services by 2030</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
3.3	Companies should train their staff to spot potential requirements for extra help, even when a customer has not previously declared it.	Compliant	<p>Values - page 4 Going the extra mile - page 6 Spotting the signs and other training - page 7 Tailored services provided to those who need extra help - pages 12 - 21 Incident management - page 23 Check in process - page 23</p> <p>In summary, our staff are trained and empowered to spot the signs of vulnerability and go the extra mile. We make sure the training is relevant to their role. Some of this training is provided in-house and some has been developed with external partners. It is a mixture of face to face classroom training and online learning. Our suite of vulnerability e-learning is mandatory for customer facing staff. We also hold 'lived experience' and 'learn at lunch' talks.</p> <p>We have Vulnerability Experts across our business who champion the needs of customers and make sure our teams are fully trained and equipped to give extra help to customers who need it. Our annual Vulnerability Awareness Week highlights issues that may affect not only our customers but our staff too and how we can support them in complex situations.</p> <p>We have specialist teams who support the customer from when they sign up to Priority Services until they move out of our area, or they no longer require extra help. We provide extensive tailored support during any incidents with our Customer Care team proactively helping Priority Services customers throughout. Our Customer Care team also sign customers up to Priority Services and keep their information up to date as well as administer our data shares and referrals to Priority Services from front line teams. Our social policy team administer our Priority Services check-in process.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Continue to be a dementia friendly utility making sure all existing and new staff are trained to be dementia friends. 2 Ensure all customer-facing staff become Friends against Scams. 3 Monitor the number of staff trained on our suite of vulnerability iLearns and evolve those training programmes using external expertise. 4 Continue to monitor the top 5 Priority Service needs to ensure we have the training in place to support our staff to deal with specific situations e.g., deaf awareness. 	Not applicable	<p>100% of staff are Dementia Friends</p> <p>100% of staff are Friends against Scams.</p> <p>100% of customer facing staff to complete vulnerability iLearns</p>
3.4	Companies should actively consider how they can reduce communication burdens on customers who need extra help; this could include establishing data sharing arrangements with partner organisations.	Compliant	<p>Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Data sharing - page 40 Case study - page 43 - 44</p> <p>In summary, we aim to reduce the burden of customers seeking help and having to contact multiple organisations through data sharing and auto-enrolment onto our support schemes where we can.</p> <p>We have data-sharing agreements in place with energy Distribution Network Operators, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), local councils, and fire services. We are expanding this to energy suppliers this year and over time to telecoms and charities as well as more councils and remaining fire services. We are supporting Northumbrian Water's Support for All project and have been involved in the national data sharing initiative through Water UK since 2017.</p> <p>We share and receive data for customers who either need to be on Priority Services or are likely to be eligible for and benefit from an affordability scheme. In many cases we can automatically enrol customers onto schemes without the need for them to apply, achieving a 'tell us once' approach. For example, data matching with the DWP allows us to auto-enrol Pension Credit recipients onto our Discount for Low-Income Pensioner tariff and our data shares with energy DNOs allows us to auto-enrol customers onto Priority Services.</p> <p>We are running a pilot with IE Hub, a tool that allows customers to complete their income and expenditure statement online. We receive the completed financial budget and can automatically apply a suitable affordability scheme. Customers flag any wider vulnerability so we can check if they need to be on Priority Services at the same time.</p> <p>Our funded debt advice partners apply for Priority Services on behalf of their clients while referring them onto one of our social tariffs or debt repayment schemes.</p> <p>Our two-way data share with the fire service helps to provide safe and well visits to customers in our area.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Increase the reach of Priority Services across our region growing the number of customers on our register over time. 2 Increase the number of data shares we have with organisations such as local councils and fire services. 3 Continue to support Northumbrian Water's Support for All project and the national data share project. 4 Fully evaluate our IE hub pilot. 	Not applicable	<p>Around 290,000 households on Priority Services by 2030</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
4.1	Companies should take appropriate steps to record customers' extra help needs. These records should be held securely and in line with wider data protection requirements.	Compliant	<p>We are required by law to prioritise customers who may be considered vulnerable or at risk. The lawful basis under which we gather and use personal information for these purposes is to carry out a task in the public interest. In carrying out this legal duty, we use information about their health so we can identify the best way to prioritise our support for them as would be expected from a supplier of essential services.</p> <p>We hold Priority Services data on a stand-alone register that is accessible only by staff who have a need to use it in their roles including during incidents. The amount of information shared is based on the actions required. For example, a customer's underlying medical reason for their presence on the register is not automatically shared unless it is absolutely necessary.</p> <p>We hold customers on the Priority Services Register under the needs codes agreed with the energy sector. We log communication methods, nominee details, and passwords within the Priority Services Register. Each need has a priority code automatically linked to it. Staff are trained and provided with information either online or in leaflet form.</p> <p>We have recently undertaken research with customers who say they prefer to tell us their needs and then let us tell them which services they will receive rather than select from a long list of support - see page 55 of the full research report on our website https://corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/media/renfbzdk/vulnerability-strategy-research-report.pdf.</p> <p>As part of the national Priority Services data sharing project with Water UK and ENA and working with the Safeguarding working group, we want to better understand how we can get the best mix of needs codes and services. We are also exploring this further with our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel.</p>	We will contact customers on Priority Services every two years to establish if they wish to continue to receive Priority Services, check their needs and details are up to date, and are also given the option to opt out of us sharing their data with other organisations.	Not applicable	<p>Attempt to contact 90% customers on our Priority Services Register</p> <p>Actually contact 55% customers on our Priority Services Register</p>
4.2	Companies' records should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.	Compliant	<p>Commitments and current performance - page 9 Temporary support - page 18 Check-in - page 23</p> <p>In summary, we regularly contact and review customers on our Priority Services Register to ensure their details and support required are up to date. If we haven't heard from a customer within two years or received an update via one of our data share partners, we will check in with them at least twice. We also take every opportunity when customers on Priority Services get in touch with us to check their data.</p> <p>Customers who need temporary extra help and want to be added to our Priority Services Register can do so under one of four categories, agreed with the energy sector. These are Temporary post-hospital, Temporary- life change, Temporary- young adult, and Families with children under 5. Codes will either drop off after 12 months or in the case of age, when children turn 18 or 5.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Contact customers on Priority Services every two years to establish if they wish to continue to receive Priority Services, check their needs and details are up to date, and are also given the option to opt out of us sharing their data with other organisations 2 Ensure we have the most up to date contact details, especially email addresses, mobile and landline numbers for our customers using different techniques to obtain their most up-to-date details. 	Not applicable	<p>Attempt to contact 90% customers on our Priority Services Register</p> <p>Actually contact 55% customers on our Priority Services Register</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
4.3	Companies should consider how their records of customers' needs can be designed in a way that can help deliver wider benefits to their customers; for example, reducing communication burdens for customers through data sharing.	Compliant	<p>Initiatives - pages 26 - 37 Data Sharing - page 40</p> <p>In summary, we aim for a tell-us-once approach. We have data-sharing agreements in place with energy Distribution Network Operators, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), local councils, and fire services. We are expanding this to energy suppliers this year and over time to telecoms and charities as well as more councils and remaining fire services. We are supporting Northumbrian Water's Support for All project and have been involved in the national data sharing initiative through Water UK since 2017.</p> <p>We have aligned our needs codes with the energy sector to ensure our data sharing is effective. We have agreed to minimum standards of service for each needs code.</p> <p>We have collaborated with National Grid and Scottish and Southern Electricity Network (SSEN) to signpost and promote two-way Priority Services online and in other communications. Our two-way data sharing with the fire service helps to provide Safe and Well visits to customers in the area.</p> <p>Customers' extra help needs are recorded on our Priority Services Register and automatically link to our contact management and other operational systems. We separately update the customer's billing account. Staff have access to Priority Services data if it is needed to fulfil their role.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Increase the number of data shares we have with organisations such as local councils and fire services. 2 Continue to support Northumbrian Water's Support for All project and the national data share project. 	Not applicable	Numeric targets not applicable
4.4	In designing their approach to recording and, where relevant, sharing customer vulnerability data, companies should clearly explain to customers how their data will be used, including any choices available to them. Companies should take steps to understand how their customers who need extra help feel about the use of their data.	Compliant	<p>Welcome - page 23</p> <p>In summary, we hold and share data under substantial public interest (SPI) in common with all water companies and deemed appropriate by the Information Commissioners Office. We have set up data-sharing protocols with our local energy Distribution Network Operators which set out our lawful bases for sharing and limiting the use of information to the provision of Priority Services only. We are very careful to limit sharing to what is necessary to achieve the purpose.</p> <p>We have a comprehensive privacy policy on our website which outlines how we use, share, and store customer data, and it provides information on their rights. www.wessexwater.co.uk/legal/privacy-policy#PSR</p> <p>We signpost to this policy on customers' bills and in a variety of literature.</p> <p>As well as providing information on our website, we are updating our online sign-up process to provide information in sections making it easier to digest when customers apply for Priority Services. When a customer signs up to our Priority Services Register over the phone or via Live Chat, we read out a statement.</p> <p>Once registered for Priority Services, a customer will receive a welcome pack to confirm we have added them to our register. We let them know why we are asking for their information and how we will use it so they can make choices. There are explanations about the chances to opt-out where we are processing their personal data under a legitimate interest, for example, to suppress their information from being automatically shared with other utility providers or to be removed from the Priority Services Register altogether.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Ask customers on Priority Services if they are satisfied with our service, including during incidents, and if their needs have been met using day-to-day tailored feedback surveys. This is in place for operational customer contact and billing and post event surveys will follow once our new billing system is implemented in 2026. 2 Proactively gather feedback from our customers and learn from their positive and negative experiences. This will include day to day feedback surveys, Trust Pilot reviews, bespoke research projects and root cause analysis of contacts and complaints. We will compare feedback from customers on Priority Services with feedback from all customers. 3 Use our check ins with customers to determine whether they still wish to be registered for Priority Services and are happy with the way we are using their data. 	Not applicable	<p>>85% of customers on Priority Services are satisfied with our service</p> <p>>85% of customers on Priority Services say their needs are met</p>

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
5.1	Companies should develop and maintain a vulnerability strategy setting out how they plan to support the extra help needs of their customer base.	Exceeding	<p>Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel - pages 3 and 5 Commitments - page 11 Initiatives - pages 25 - 37 Case study - page 52 Development of the strategy - Appendix I</p> <p>In summary, we have had a vulnerability strategy in place since 2018 and year on year it has evolved to meet changing needs and expectations. It is co-created with our customers, partners, organisations, and stakeholders and updated and published annually.</p> <p>Our strategy is endorsed by customers, organisations, stakeholders and CCW and it's development is overseen by our expert Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel (VAP). The strategy sets out our approach to delivering extra help in the short, medium, and long term. This year we have updated it to take account of the Service for All guidelines and views of our VAP, CCW, our partners (including those we fund) and our customers through a variety of engagement and research.</p> <p>The strategy includes our ethos and values, the work we've done in this important area to date and our commitments and targets to 2030. It explains the governance we have in place for the strategy and provides a timeline for it's development including key research and milestones. Case studies are used to showcase our work. Previous versions of this strategy can be found on our website www.corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/document-library</p> <p>We constantly look for new ways to improve the service we offer. We have four very well-established workstreams, with a wealth of innovative initiatives in each, to maximise awareness, increase take-up of the extra help we provide, and improve the customer experience. All initiatives, past, present, and future are mapped to the Service for All guidance.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Continue to involve customers, partners, organisations and stakeholders in the co-creation of our services and this strategy as a whole. 2 Monitor and report on progress with delivering our initiatives and meeting our commitments and aims. 3 Update and publish our strategy each year overseen by our Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel. 4 Comply with or exceed all expectations set out in the Service for all guidance. 	Not applicable	Numeric targets not applicable.

No.	Minimum Expectation	Compliance	Implementation	Monitoring	Challenges	Targets
5.2	Companies should take steps to understand the likely underlying requirements for extra help in their areas.	Compliant	<p>Commitments - pages 10 - 11 Tailored services provided to those who need extra help - pages 12 - 21 Initiatives - pages 25 - 37 Partnerships - pages 38 - 41 Case Studies - pages 46 and 51 Development of the strategy - Appendix I</p> <p>In summary, we have had a vulnerability strategy in place since 2018 and year on year it has evolved to meet changing needs and expectations. We have four very well established workstreams, with a wealth of innovative initiatives in each, to maximise awareness, increase uptake of the extra help we provide and improve the customer experience. All initiatives, past, present, and future are mapped to the Service for All guidance. Each year we have used case studies to showcase our work. Previous versions of this strategy can be found on our website www.corporate.wessexwater.co.uk/document-library</p> <p>Our expert Stakeholder Vulnerability Advisory Panel oversees the development of our strategy. They support, advise, and challenge us to ensure we are fulfilling our commitment to reach all our customers. Along with our 300 partners and wider stakeholders, they have helped co-create the services we offer to specific client groups on Priority Services, understand any gaps in our service provision and identify individual initiatives to raise awareness and increase take-up of our support.</p> <p>In our strategy we set out the current and future needs of people living in the UK, how many customers we currently support under Priority Services, and how many we expect to support by 2030. We use external datasets to identify areas to focus promotion of our work and increase uptake. This is easier for established extra help needs which are typically medium or long term but more difficult for shorter term needs. We produce data maps to track and identify trends and gaps in our Priority Services provision. We are considering proposals from several organisations to support us further in this area e.g., providing additional datasets to enrich our analysis or creating a Priority Services Index to identify gaps in provision both now and into the future.</p> <p>Working closely with more strategic partners and funding projects we can identify the level of help needed and the gap in Priority Services reach. For example, we have been working with Kidney Care UK since 2023 to reach and better support people with chronic kidney disease. In 2022 we worked with the Royal Association for Deaf. We have also had partnerships with many organisations supporting people living with dementia. These partners work with us or customers in many ways including hosting events, sharing social media posts, sending promotional material to customers, attending venues where customers with extra needs will be, and supporting with video content.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Increase the reach of Priority Services across our region growing the number of customers on our register over time. 2 Use a variety of tools and external data sources to track and identify trends and gaps in our Priority Services reach now and into the future, working with external partners where needed. 3 Continue to explore opportunities to work together with existing or new partners or organisations to reach more groups of customers that need extra help. 	Not applicable	Around 290,000 households on Priority Services by 2030

We would like to hear from you if you have any ideas or comments about this strategy or if you want to partner with us.

Please contact

Kate Robbins

Head of Customer Policy

kate.robbs@wessexwater.co.uk

or

CommunityPartners@wessexwater.co.uk

Also, visit our [PartnerHub website](#) which provides information about the support we offer and offers access to resources to help raise awareness.

Other related documents

This document forms part of a group of documents that set out our strategy, policy and procedure for customers who need extra help.

Other documents include:

- **Priority Services** core customer information
- **Debt Recovery** core customer information
- **Help with your bills**
- **WaterSure**
- **Discount for low income pensioners**
- **Switch to a meter**

If you would like to request any of these documents, please get in touch:

Call 0345 600 3 600

(Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm)

Website Submit an online enquiry: [wessexwater.co.uk/contact-us](https://www.wessexwater.co.uk/contact-us)

Write Wessex Water, 1 Clevedon Walk, Nailsea, Bristol, BS48 1WA

Monitoring and review

This strategy is reviewed every 12 months or in line with other legislative changes.



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