

Wessex Water makes record levels of investment

Wessex Water is making record levels of investment delivering multimillion pound projects to improve services for customers and protect the environment.

We are investing £1.4 billion between 2020 and 2025 – our largest ever investment programme – on water, sewerage and environmental schemes across the region with some major projects already completed.

This includes a £50 million scheme at Durleigh Water Treatment Centre, near Bridgwater, to update water treatment processes to ensure that the highest quality drinking water would continue to be delivered to a population of more than 44,000 in Somerset.

And over the coming weeks the largest sewerage project in Bristol in decades – the £55 million North Bristol relief sewer – will be fully operational, which supports ongoing and future development in Bristol and South Gloucestershire and will minimise the risk of flooding and the use of storm overflows during wet weather. It involved the construction of a 6.5km ‘super sewer’ tunnelled underground to minimise traffic disruption and environmental impact.

Replacing ageing water mains, reducing leaks and ensuring a more reliable future supply for our customers remains a top priority with millions invested this year alone, while every month £3 million is being spent on improvements to reduce how often storm overflows operate. Last month Wessex Water published data that showed discharges from storm overflows during the bathing season near designated bathing water locations have more than halved, with 87 occurring between 15 May and 30 September 2021 and 39 during the same period this year. Exceptionally dry weather was a factor with less rainwater entering the combined sewer network.

Chief Executive Colin Skellett said: “Climate change is driving real changes in weather patterns with shorter, more intense rainfall and longer dry periods. The former increases the frequency of storm overflow operation and the latter adds to concerns about long term resilience of water resources and supply.

“Multimillion pound projects completed in recent months help to ensure we have much better resilience to tackle the effect of climate change – from safeguarding water supplies to increasing capacity in the sewerage network.

“Tackling storm overflows is not a simple task, but we’re already making a difference. We support the progressive improvement to and eventual elimination of storm overflows and have already improved 600. We are currently spending £3 million per month to make further improvements as part of our published plan for tackling storm overflows.”

This year has been exceptionally dry, with drought being declared across large areas of the country, including Wessex Water. Wessex Water followed a well-rehearsed drought plan to ensure it has adequate resources if this dry year is followed by a dry winter and a continuing drought into next year.

Mr Skellett added: “We are fortunate to have resilient groundwater resources and our investment of around £250 million over several years in a water grid, enables us to move water around our region. The 20% reduction we have made in leakage and our work to encourage customers to use water wisely has meant that we have not had to impose a temporary use ban – the last restriction on water use within Wessex Water was 46 years ago.”

With concern over the cost of living crisis deepening, we have made sure that there is a range of affordability support in place to help customers in different situations. Already there are 54,000 customers on special payment arrangements, and in response to growing demand, we have made it easier for customers to obtain help. Additionally, we have worked with the Department of Work and Pensions so that we can automatically apply a discount to the bills of a further 55,000 of our low income pensioners.

In the first six months of the year, Wessex Water continued to work hard to meet the great majority of 2022-23 regulatory targets and performance indicators, against what has been an exceptionally prolonged hot and dry period of weather.

Financial results for the six months to September 2022 showed turnover increased by £6.9m from £259.9m to £266.8m, while profit after taxation was £3.8m, up £71.6m on last year’s loss of £67.8m which included a one off tax charge of £96.9m relating to the change in rate of Corporation Tax.