

YourVoice statement | 2024/25



We, the YourVoice Independent Challenge Group, have been operating since 2014. Our aim is to make sure that United Utilities Water (the company) consults its customers and stakeholders (those with an interest in the company) to understand and take account of their views and priorities.

We make sure that engagement activities, such as customer workshops, focus groups, surveys and research carried out by the company are clear and understandable to those taking part, and that the results are reflected in the company's business plans and in its day-to-day operations.

We monitor the company's actual performance against its published performance targets. We receive reports on the company's ongoing improvement plans, and continually review and challenge areas where its performance falls short of these targets.

We have monitored the company's research and engagement with customers and stakeholders in preparing the next business plan for the five-year period from 2025 to 2030. The business plan was widely discussed and was the subject of extensive research and consultation with customers and stakeholders. In fact, around 95,000 household and business customers from across the North West were consulted on the proposed plan.

We made sure that results from the research and consultation were reflected in the final business plan. We commented to Ofwat, the water regulator, on the very good quality and variety of this customer and stakeholder engagement and reported that, in our opinion, customers' views were central to the company's decision-making and were included in the business plan. Our experience in monitoring the company's ongoing performance helped us to comment on and challenge the proposed performance targets included in the 2025 to 2030 business plan.

Ofwat has reviewed and challenged the business plan in its final decision process. The company has now started the biggest programme of work it has ever carried out to deliver the improvements that customers wanted. The YourVoice report, which gives our assessment of how the company has carried out customer research and engagement, is available at yourvoiceicg.co.uk. The report also sets out how we have provided independent advice and challenged the company, and how the company has responded to this.

We are independent of the company, and our members represent customers, stakeholders, large and small businesses, the Environment Agency, the Consumer Council for Water, the voluntary, charitable and environmental sectors, disability charities, and vulnerable customers, future bill payers, and money and community advice services. We are not all industry experts, but act as informed customers and challenge the company on that basis.

So that we can have meaningful discussions and monitor the company's work at an appropriate level of detail, we have four subgroups:

- customer engagement;
- environment and social capital;
- affordability and vulnerability; and
- stakeholder.

The company's directors and senior staff attend subgroup meetings, and we have regular access to the company's Chief Executive and board members.



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2024/2025 is the final year of the company's current five-year business plan, which began in 2020. The company's performance shows many areas of good performance at or above target. It achieved 77% of its 47 performance commitments for the last year. However, it did not meet 23% of its targets.

Some areas where targets have not been met are as follows.

- Having a reliable and high-quality water supply is a major priority for customers in the North West. All water companies use the Compliance Risk Index (CRI) to monitor water-quality standards, as required by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The challenging target is a score of zero, but in year five of the business plan three sample failures at two major treatment works meant that the company scored 10.29. This is an area for improvement and is the subject of a continuing water-quality improvement programme, which the company is confident will address future issues and allow it to achieve this important target in the future. The company continues to give us regular reports on water quality. Recent reports have shown that, although it did not meet the target for this commitment, the number of customer contacts about the taste, smell and appearance of water has reduced year-on-year. This is partly due to work carried out in 2024/25 to clean water network pipes, including 60 kilometres of the Vyrnwy Aqueduct, which serves Cheshire, Merseyside and the wider North West. This work will finish in 2028.

- The target for reducing water-supply interruptions was not met. The time customers were without water averaged 14 minutes and 17 seconds. This was caused by two large-scale bursts on the water network, which added 4 minutes and 36 seconds to this figure, and freeze-thaw events in January 2025, which added almost one minute. Freeze-thaws happen when temperatures plummet and then rise quickly, causing pipes to burst and resulting in more leaks and interruptions to the water supply. The company's 'water on wheels' tankers were used when the water supply was disrupted, and customers on the Priority Services Register were given extra help during these incidents.
- Preventing flooding continues to be a priority for the company and customers, as sewer flooding is one of the worst service failures customers can experience. There were 1,218 flooding incidents inside homes and businesses (internal flooding) in 2024/25, which is considerably more than the company's target of 500. In terms of external flooding (flooding incidents outside homes and businesses) 7,365 incidents were recorded against a target of 5,859 incidents. Emergency services declared a major incident across Greater Manchester on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, when extra arrangements needed to be made because of flooding caused by heavy rainfall and wind. There were more prolonged wet weather conditions during the year, including an increased number of named storms, and these put great challenges on the United Utilities network. A variety of schemes are in place to reduce

these levels of flooding. The Dynamic Network Management system continues to monitor flows in the wastewater network and alerts the company to issues before they arise. The company has had success with its ongoing work to educate customers about what not to flush down their toilets or pour down their sinks as part of the 'stop the block' campaign. This campaign increased awareness among customers by 51%. A dedicated blockage team responds quickly to incidents and finds out what caused the problem, with the aim of reducing repeat issues. Work will continue in this area and should improve the company's performance. We will continue to actively monitor this.



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- There was an increase in pollution incidents in 2024/25, partly due to severe weather and the number of named storms. The company's performance was 45 incidents per 10,000 kilometres of sewer. The Environment Agency recorded one category-1 and one category-2 incident – these two categories are the most serious in terms of the environment. The company has put in place plans to help prevent further issues, including projects to reduce power failures during storms, staff training and increased maintenance routines.
- 98.20% of the water released at 388 treatment works met the conditions of the relevant Environment Agency permit, against a target of 100%. Seven treatment works failed to meet the conditions of their permits. Detailed investigations have been carried out to identify the causes of the failure and action plans have been put in place to prevent failures in the future.
- The company did not meet its leakage target for 2024/25. However, the amount of water lost from the network is at the lowest ever three-year average and reduced by 7.3% between 2020 and 2025. Significant freeze-thaw events in January 2025 affected the company's performance, but an incident task team continues to work on reducing leaks. Raising awareness of how to find, report and reduce leaks continues to be one of the company's communication priorities. The company is using drone technology to search for leaks and continues to use the Dynamic Network Management system to detect abnormal flows of water, which might show there is a leak.

Some areas where performance targets have been achieved are as follows.

- Sewer collapses can cause blockages in the sewer, which can lead to flooding and other pollution issues. The year-five target was met by achieving 12.93 collapses per 1,000 kilometres of sewer against a target of 13.07.
- The average amount of water used each day by each person in the region is called 'per capita consumption'. In 2024/25, the average amount of water used per person reduced. The company met its three-year rolling target, which was to reduce the amount of water used by 6.3% compared with the 144 litres used per day at the start of the business plan period in 2020. The average amount of water used per person in 2024/25 was 134.3 litres – 6.7% lower than the starting position. The company continues to use social media and advertising campaigns to encourage customers to save water. The improved metering programme 'cheaper with a meter' and the 'lowest bill guarantee scheme', along with the company's commitment to provide water-saving devices, will continue. Saving water, saving energy and helping the environment have been continuing campaign themes, particularly in light of the current economic situation and the challenges of climate change. The company has found that its campaigning is now having a positive impact on how much water is used. Work to continue this trend is vital and we will be monitoring this important area for customers.

- Good customer service has been reflected in the company's performance against Ofwat's measure of customer service and experience (C-MeX). The company is expecting to be ranked eighth out of the 17 water and wastewater companies in 2024/25. The company offers 10 ways for customers to contact it, including social media and live chat alongside more traditional contact methods, so customers can choose the method that suits them.
- 84,726 customers were lifted out of water poverty (where customers spend more than 3% of their disposable income on water bills) through the company's industry-leading dynamic range of affordability schemes.
- The company beat its commitment to provide £280 million of support to customers who are having difficulties paying their water bills. Following feedback from customers, the company improved its customer affordability schemes to make it easier for people to apply. Last year, 178,313 customers received support on a discounted tariff, and a further 22,547 customers benefited from the company's payment-matching scheme, where every pound the customer pays towards their water bills is matched by the company. 38,597 customers used the 'Help to Pay' scheme, 27,804 vulnerable customers accessed the 'Water Sure' scheme and 111,912 customer were on the 'Back on Track' scheme.

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- The company replaced 3,263 lead pipes at customers' properties, helping to improve the quality of water customers receive in their homes.
- The company's Priority Services scheme, which over 540,000 customers have signed up for, continues to help those who need extra support. The company successfully works with other utility companies and trusted partners to share information so that vulnerable customers can be enrolled onto each organisation's priority services scheme. This year this service has retained the ISO22548 Kitemark accreditation to recognise its work in supporting vulnerable customers.
- Ongoing work to identify and bill as many people as possible who are receiving a water and wastewater service has been successful and beat the target by reducing the number of properties that are occupied but not billed. This work helps to make sure bills are fairer for all customers.

Over the last few years, the performance of storm overflows has understandably been of considerable interest to customers, stakeholders, environmentalists and the media. Storm overflows are designed to release (spill) rainwater and sewage into the environment when there is a risk of the sewer flooding during a storm. The company met its target of monitoring 100% of storm overflows before the end of 2023. There has been a 39% reduction in spills in the five-year period to 2025, with a 24% reduction in 2024 when there were 20,000 fewer spills than in 2023. This performance is still not acceptable, and the 2025 to 2030 business plan includes £2.4 billion of proposed investment to improve storm overflows. This investment is the UK's biggest spill-reduction plan and aims to achieve a 60% reduction in spills by 2030. The scale of work will be challenging for the company, its contractors and partners, and we, along with water-industry regulators, will be monitoring all aspects of this plan, including the way it is delivered, the company's performance, the cost of delivering the plan and the effect the plan has on the environment.

This year, the company has again produced an easy-to-read performance summary, which is available online and is accessible on mobile phones. It has received Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark, showing it has been approved for clarity. The company continues to use social media to share key performance messages with more customers. We are pleased to report that, in our opinion, the United Utilities Annual Performance Report accurately reflects the company's performance for 2024/25.

As ever, during the coming year we will continue to monitor and challenge the company on behalf of customers and stakeholders. If you would like to contact us about the company's performance or our work, please email us at contactus@yourvoiceicg.co.uk

Bernice Law
Independent Chair, YourVoice
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You can read our Annual Performance Report at

annualperformancereport2025.unitedutilities.com

