

# Taking action to reduce pollution Our plan 2026



## Foreword from our Chief Executive Officer

Protecting and improving the water environment is one of our most important responsibilities.

We are fortunate that many of the most beautiful rivers, lakes and coastlines in England are here in the North West. We have a crucial role in protecting them for present and future generations as they contribute hugely to the character of our region, and to the quality of life of our communities.

Every day, our teams provide high-quality drinking water to around eight million people, from Cumbria to Cheshire, and carefully collect and treat wastewater before returning it to nature. We aim to do that reliably, within all rules and regulations that apply, and to the highest standards – and most of the time we do exactly that.

However, we are always working hard to be better. In this report we set out the progress we are making, while also acknowledging areas where we need to improve. Our target is to reduce the number of pollution incidents by at least 30% between 2024 and 2030, and we have committed to spending £109 million on our pollution and spill reduction plans during that period.



**We are investing over £13 billion in our biggest infrastructure upgrade for more than a century.**

Every pollution incident is one too many, and we share the concerns of our communities about the harm they can cause. That's why we are investing over £13 billion between 2025 and 2030 in the biggest upgrade of the North West water infrastructure (such as treatment works and pipes) for a century. More than half that investment is focused on wastewater – increasing the amount of wastewater we can treat, upgrading technology and constructing more storm overflows to deliver the 60% reduction in spills that we have committed to achieve by 2030.

The challenges we face are only getting bigger as climate change and population growth increase the pressure on our networks. We are responding by making our systems more resilient and improving how we use data to solve problems before they get worse, for example by avoiding the power cuts or sewer blockages that contribute to so many incidents.

While we are committed to these improvements, we need to work with others to make lasting progress. Whether it is working with farmers to manage agricultural run-off, with businesses to treat trade waste, with planners to develop better drainage or with customers to reduce the number of blockages, we all have a part to play in protecting the water environment.

As this report shows, there is real momentum building – but there is a lot more to do. We will continue to embrace our leadership role as we continue to work together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. L. Beardmore".

**Louise Beardmore**  
Chief Executive Officer



## Our ambition: cleaner, healthier rivers, lakes, and coastlines

The way pollution incidents are measured is changing.

From 2026, the Environment Agency will use a new standard for measuring pollution. This will include a wider definition of what counts as a pollution incident, and we expect this will lead to more pollution incidents being reported than previously.

We are committed to meeting the requirements of these new rules and continuing to track our performance against the Environment Agency's old standard to allow us and our customers to compare our performance now with how we have performed in the past. On this basis, we are setting ourselves the following bold target.

**To cut pollution incidents by at least 30% between 2024 and 2030.**

We will be reporting on our progress against this target in April every year.

## Our progress: reduced pollution incidents, increased transparency

The following statistics show our performance in 2025.

We recorded **zero** category-1 incidents (the most serious).

We recorded **two** category-2 incidents.

We recorded a **reduction** in overall wastewater pollution incidents, down to 311 from 347 in 2024 (see note below).

We reported **93%** of incidents to the Environment Agency (self-reporting), demonstrating our commitment to transparency and taking action when things go wrong.

Note: This reflects our position as of 15 January 2026 and may change when the Environment Agency has completed its decision-making process and when any appeals associated with this are completed.

For more information, please read our [Pollution Incident Reduction Plan](#).

## Why pollution happens...

Pollution incidents have a range of causes, but many link back to the condition and performance of our infrastructure, and external factors that affect our work.

Here are some of the main things that contribute to pollution incidents.

- **Failure of equipment**, such as pumps or electrical systems
- **Blocked sewers**, often caused by flushing wet wipes down the toilet or pouring fats and oils down the sink
- **Power cuts**, often linked to extreme weather
- **Heavy rainfall**, causing strain on sewer systems
- **Deterioration of our assets**, as pipes and equipment age

## ...and it's getting more challenging

Climate change and population growth are putting more pressure on our networks.

Heavier rainfall and longer dry spells are creating a more unpredictable water environment.



We are getting more stormy weather. One named storm alone accounted for 12% of pollution incidents in 2025.



A growing population across the North West means more homes, more businesses and more wastewater entering the network every day.



Urban development is changing how water flows. More hard surfaces are sending rainwater straight into drains instead of letting it soak into the ground, and this means sewers are more likely to be overloaded.



# What we are doing to reduce pollution

From sewers and pumping stations to treatment works and mains pipes, we are making improvements in every area of our work to reduce the risk of pollution.

Here are some examples of our recent progress.

## 1 Preventing failures before they happen

- Installing back-up power systems (including generators and batteries) at 50 high-risk sites, helping to avoid 31 pollution incidents last year
- A new preventative approach to maintaining our assets that has allowed us to identify four times the number of faults before they cause pollution incidents
- Using artificial intelligence (AI) to predict problems with our assets before they cause pollution incidents

## 2 Responding faster

- Our Environmental Events Management Desk is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and has improved the way we respond to incidents
- Thousands of new sensors across the network raise the alarm when things go wrong

## 3 Tackling blockages

- Investing £6 million in cleaning 442km of sewers
- Visiting local food businesses to install 323 grease-removal units to reduce the amount of fat building up in sewers
- Major behaviour-change campaigns ('Stop the Block' and 'Change the Cycle'), with over 80% of customers aware of these

## 4 Investing in the future

- Ongoing programmes to renew water mains and adjust water pressure on our network (known as pressure optimisation) to reduce the number of bursts
- Trials of new technologies, such as Sewerball sensors and AI-enabled camera analysis, to detect blockages and infrastructure problems early
- Working with local authorities, developers and environmental groups to promote more environmentally friendly, nature-based drainage systems to reduce pressure on sewers

For more information, please see our

[Pollution Incident Reduction Plan](#) >

## We need your help too

Many pollution incidents start with something going down the drain that shouldn't.

You can help us to **'Stop the Block'**.

Only flush the three Ps – pee, poo, and (toilet) paper – down the loo.

Keep wet wipes, including biodegradable wipes, out of the toilet.

Put cooking fats and oil in the bin or food caddy, not down the sink.

# STOP THE BLOCK!

We are also working with homeowners, builders and plumbers to fix connection problems, where pipes have been plumbed into surface-water drains by mistake.



## Next steps for 2026 and beyond

We are continuing to increase our efforts, including the following.

Up to 15,000 extra network sensors planned by 2030 to help us understand the condition of the sewers.

Improved cleaning programmes for sewers, pumping stations and storm tanks.

Upgrades at around 200 sites to make them better able to cope with power cuts.

More preventative maintenance to reduce the number of asset failures.

Increased use of predictive technology and monitoring cameras.

Local teams to act quickly to prevent or deal with pollution incidents.

Regulatory changes in 2026 will mean more incidents must be reported, even when they have a minor effect on the environment. This means that reported numbers may rise, but our underlying performance will continue to improve.

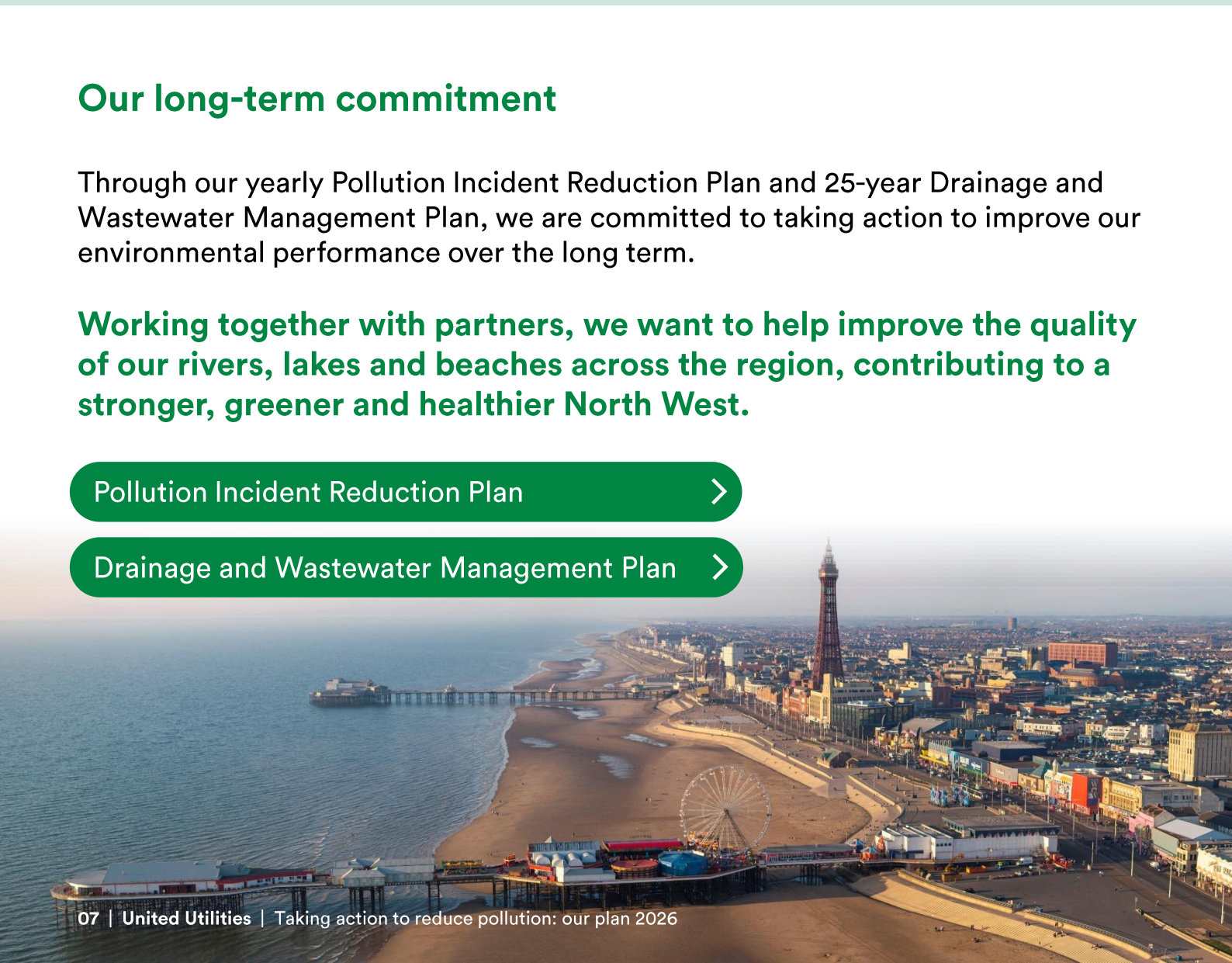
## Our long-term commitment

Through our yearly Pollution Incident Reduction Plan and 25-year Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan, we are committed to taking action to improve our environmental performance over the long term.

**Working together with partners, we want to help improve the quality of our rivers, lakes and beaches across the region, contributing to a stronger, greener and healthier North West.**

[Pollution Incident Reduction Plan](#) >

[Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan](#) >



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**Water for the North West**