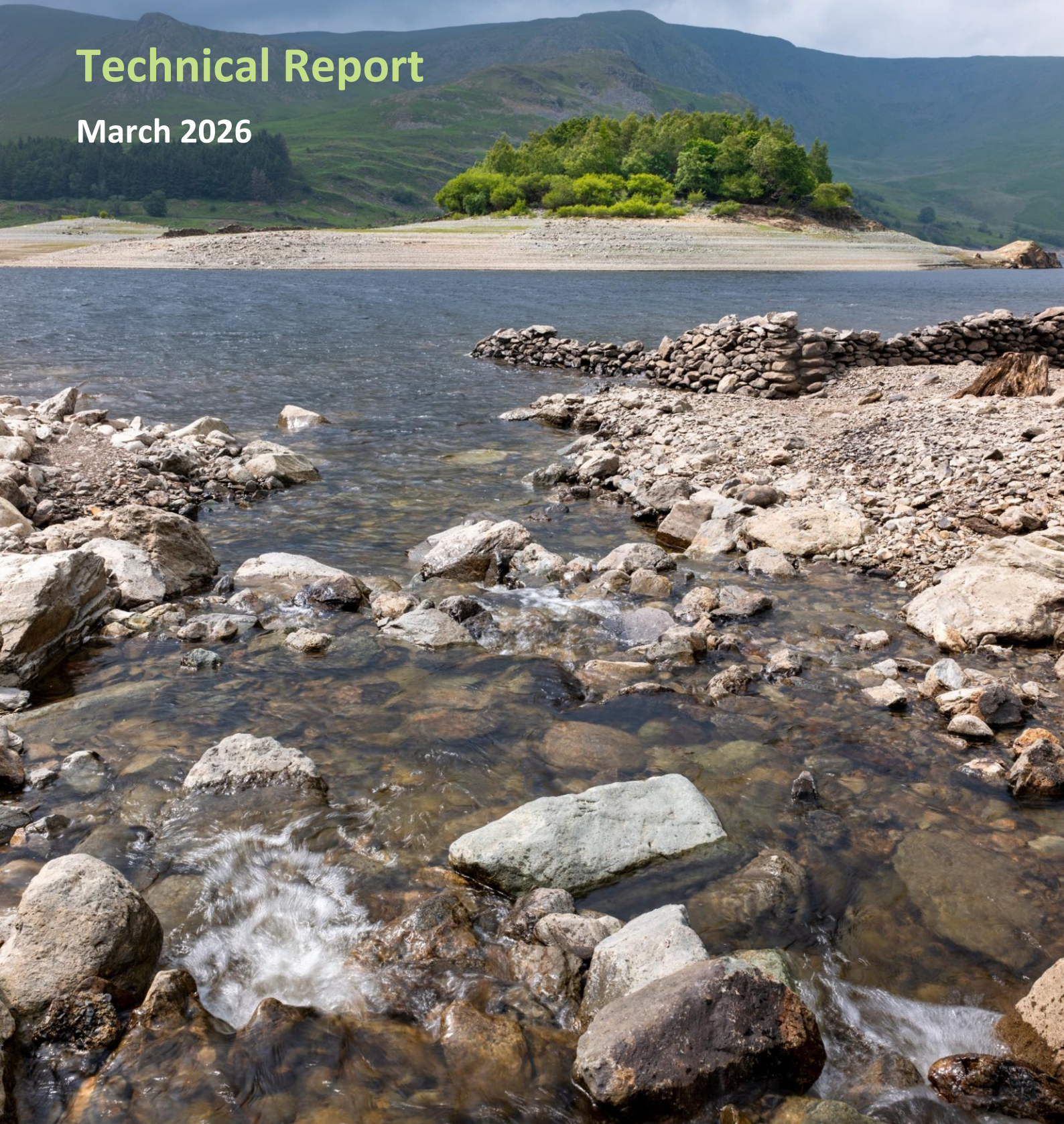


Draft Drought Plan 2027

Non-Public Water Supply

Technical Report

March 2026



Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 3**
- 2. Numbers of private water supplies 4**
 - 2.1 Regional private water supplies.....4
 - 2.2 Types of private water supplies5
- 3. Legislation 6**
- 4. Guidance 7**
- 5. Roles and responsibilities 8**
- 6. Our policy 9**
 - 6.1 Framework for provision of alternative supplies.....9
 - 6.2 Escalated requests/notices9
 - 6.3 Fire service commitments.....10

1. Introduction

A private water supply is any supply which supplies one or more properties, such as homes, businesses or farms, that is not provided by a water company. The water is intended for human consumption or for use in any food undertaking where its quality could affect the final product.¹ Most private water supplies are located in remote or rural areas, and typically consist of boreholes, natural springs or piped supplies from streams and other watercourses.

This document provides background information on private water supplies in United Utilities' region in the context of England, outlines the relevant legislation and sets out our policy relating to the support that would be available to the users of private water supplies should these fail. It also includes information on how we will fulfil our obligations in the provision of water for fire and rescue services.

¹ [What are Private supplies? - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

2. Numbers of private water supplies

2.1 Regional private water supplies

According to local authority records, in 2024 there were 33,133 private water supplies in England. It is estimated that these supply around 1.47 per cent of the population, including not only domestic customers but also commercial premises such as farms, bed and breakfast accommodation, holiday lets, hotels, sporting clubs, manufacturers and other businesses.²

Private water supplies are located in most regions of England, with the highest numbers usually being found in rural areas where connection to the public mains network may be difficult. There are 4,875 private water supplies (PWS) in North West England, which represents almost 14 per cent of all the PWS in England.

Table 1 shows the variation in the number of PWS across England by customer and geographic region. This is based on the latest dataset held by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) as of July 2025, so the total is slightly different from that quoted in the 2024 annual report.

Table 1: Numbers of private water supplies by customer and geographical region

Region	Private distribution systems (Regulation 8)	Large supplies and any size supply used in a public building or a commercial activity (Regulation 9)	Small, shared domestic supplies (Regulation 10)	Single domestic dwellings	Total	Percentage of England total
East Midlands	20	237	172	836	1,265	3.6
East of England	84	800	467	1,818	3,169	9.1
Greater London	4	19	2	75	100	0.3
North East England	14	570	247	680	1,511	4.3
North West England	17	1,145	898	2,815	4,875	13.9
South East England	49	378	330	878	1,635	4.7
South West England	126	4,026	1,322	7,027	12,501	35.7
West Midlands	14	750	515	4,892	6,171	17.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	853	701	2,222	3,780	10.8
England total	332	8,778	4,654	21,243	35,007	

² Data from DWI 'Drinking Water 2024 – Private water supplies in England', DWI, May 2025, at [Drinking Water 2024 - Private water supplies in England - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#).

2.2 Types of private water supplies

There are three main types of water supplies under the Private Water Supplies (England) Regulation 2016, which are subject to routine monitoring:

- Regulation 8³ – Private distribution systems: mains water supplied by a water company, then distributed privately by another person/organisation (e.g. universities, caravan parks, landlords).
- Regulation 9⁴ – Large supplies and supplies to public/commercial premises: Any supply used in public or commercial activity, generally supplies of 10 m³/day or more of water, or supplying 50+ people (e.g. schools, B&Bs, workplaces).
- Regulation 10⁵ – Small supplies (domestic use): Supplies that provide water to fewer than 50 people and less than 10 m³/day, and that are not used in public/commercial premises (e.g. two or three private houses sharing a spring or borehole).

Additionally, single domestic dwellings are a private supply serving just one household, which are not subject to routine monitoring unless requested or thought to pose a health risk.

³ [Information note on regulation 8 \(revised version\) - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

⁴ [Information note on Regulation 9 - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

⁵ [Types of private supplies \(England\) - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

3. Legislation

The legal framework governing private water supplies in England and Wales is set out through a combination of primary and secondary legislation. Section 80 of the Water Industry Act 1991 establishes the overarching statutory powers, while subsequent regulations define the specific duties and enforcement responsibilities of local authorities. Legislation governing private water supplies in England and Wales is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Private water supply legislation



⁶ [Water Industry Act 1991](#)

⁷ [The Private Water Supplies \(England\) Regulations 2016](#)

⁸ [The Private Water Supplies \(Wales\) Regulations 2017](#)

4. Guidance

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) has no direct enforcement powers under the Regulations in relation to private water supplies. Their technical guidance note 'Managing insufficiency of private water supplies 2017'⁹ is intended to assist stakeholders of private water supplies in their understanding of the following:

- If a private water supply should become insufficient due to drought conditions, a relevant person(s) should refer to their contingency plan. Where a contingency plan is not yet in place, the relevant person(s) may seek advice from the local authority or the water company, but there is no obligation on either to provide an alternative supply of water except where the local authority considers the circumstances to pose a danger to life or human health.
- In this instance there is no obligation on either to provide an alternative supply of water except where the local authority considers circumstances to pose a danger to life or human health. Where the local authority believes this is the case, they have powers to require, if practicable, the local water company to supply water at reasonable cost for a period as specified by the local authority. These services can be charged for and costs recovered from the relevant person(s) to which the supply is provided.

⁹ [Managing insufficiency of private water supplies - Drinking Water Inspectorate](#)

5. Roles and responsibilities

Contingency procedures, owned and maintained by the relevant persons responsible for a private water supply, should set out how risks will be mitigated during a temporary interruption, for example during periods of drought, and should include arrangements for alternative supplies of water.

Local authorities should ensure that this documentation is in place through their regulation 6 risk assessments (with exception of those private water supplies serving a single domestic dwelling, unless a request has been made to do so) and five yearly reviews and require their development when missing or deficient. This is particularly important for large supplies and those where the water is consumed as part of a commercial or public activity (regulation 9 supplies). Local authorities may assist the relevant person(s) with their procedures by providing details of recognised providers, or their framework agreement with the local water company. A summary of the roles and responsibilities is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of roles and responsibilities

	Summary of roles and responsibilities
Relevant persons who own a private water supply (as defined in Section 80 WIA 1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for ensuring the private water supply is safe and sufficient, including planning for periods of insufficiency. Expected to take corrective action when supply becomes insufficient or is at risk of becoming insufficient.
Local Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities are responsible for regulating private water supplies used for domestic purposes (such as drinking, cooking, and washing) in both domestic and commercial premises Hold powers to act when a private supply is, has, or may become insufficient. Can serve notices requiring remediation where supply is not providing adequate water for human consumption. Have enforcement rights where relevant persons fail to take required corrective steps.
Water Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our involvement is situational and arises when a private supply cannot meet demand and an alternative or emergency provision is considered (our policy is explained in section 4).
DWI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides guidance on insufficiency, legal context, and responsibilities of all parties Outlines powers of local authorities and water companies during insufficiency incidents.

6. Our policy

6.1 Framework for provision of alternative supplies

Our policy, informed by the DWI 'Managing insufficiency of private water supplies' guidance, has been formed through joint working with Local Authorities and communicated through Public Health liaison routes. We set out our policy relating to private water supplies during emergency situations in the 'Framework for provision of alternative supplies for Private Water Supplies'.

During prolonged dry weather and droughts our priority has to be using our equipment, bottled water stocks and resources for maintaining supplies to customers. In times of drought, it is important for us to support people, businesses and farms that rely on their own private water sources for essential needs such as drinking and watering livestock, should their supplies fail. Water companies are not responsible for these supplies, with responsibility resting with the relevant local authority, however, we recognise the vital role these supplies play and are committed to providing appropriate support where necessary.

Our policy states:

For domestic supplies:

- We will provide bottled water for up to 72 hours following a request from the local authority in emergency situations, which we will endeavour to provide within 24 hours.
- If we are approached directly, the same service will be provided and the relevant local authority informed.
- We can provide bowsers if available and by exception if formally requested by local authority.
- The quantity of water provided will be up to a maximum of 10 litres/person/day.

For non-domestic supplies:

- We have provided water to livestock within our supply area. Although this is not a requirement under Security and Emergency Measures Direction¹⁰ (SEMD), we intend to continue offering this support where resources and operational conditions allow.
- We can also investigate the option of a permanent connection to our network for a premises.

For large supplies:

- Where the supply is in excess of 10,000 litres per day for example, it is not practicable to provide an alternate supply at short notice. Owners of such supplies should have prearranged plans in place for emergency and non-emergency situations. For this scale of private supply we could look into the possibility of a permanent mains connection for the premises.

6.2 Escalated requests/notices

According to DWI guidance, local authorities can request supplies for extended periods where circumstances pose a danger to life or human health. In these instances:

- Requests should be referred to the Public Health team at United Utilities for assessment.
- We will:
 - Check if a notice has been served;
 - Consider each request on a case-by-case basis;
 - Discuss other options and provide assistance in terms of alternative suppliers (considering competition law);

¹⁰ [The Security and Emergency Measures \(water and sewerage undertakers and water supply licensees\)\(Amendment and Revocation\) Direction 2024](#)

- Agree the duration of extension required;
 - Review the practicality of any assistance being provided in light of the latest event and resource information; and
 - Agree cost of service.
- Bottled water is still the preferred option for extension and this must be reviewed alongside the practicalities of location, duration and severity of public health risk.

6.3 Fire service commitments

We will fulfil our obligations regarding the provision of water for fire and rescue services. During incident response, this is achieved through liaison between partners to share information about incident scale and response options. This can be achieved via direct contact between operational or tactical staff, or between the Integrated Control Centre (ICC) and Fire Control. This liaison can implement a range of operational responses that can be decided through shared situational awareness with our incident response teams, operations and our fire service partners. Such actions can assist in mitigating customer impacts of poor pressure, no water or discoloured water.

In 2020 United Utilities proactively established an 'Operational Liaison Group' with all six of the fire and rescue services in our supply area with the following objectives:

- Support each member organisation towards their compliance with relevant legislation through collaboration, information sharing and cooperation. Legislation within the scope of the group is the:
 - Water Industry Act 1991;
 - Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004;
 - Civil Contingencies Act 2004; and
 - National guidance document on the provision of water for fire-fighting 2007.
- Put arrangements are in place to ensure effective and proportionate incident response.
- Facilitate information and data exchange in incident/emergency planning and response.
- Ensure that learning from incidents/emergencies is maximised.
- Explore opportunities for innovation and alternative approaches to incident response, training and exercising.

United Utilities Water Limited
Haweswater House
Lingley Mere Business Park
Lingley Green Avenue
Great Sankey
Warrington
WA5 3LP
unitedutilities.com



Water for the North West