
FOR EVERYONE:

Our customer inclusivity strategy 2023-30

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

ESSEX & SUFFOLK
WATER *living water*



Introduction

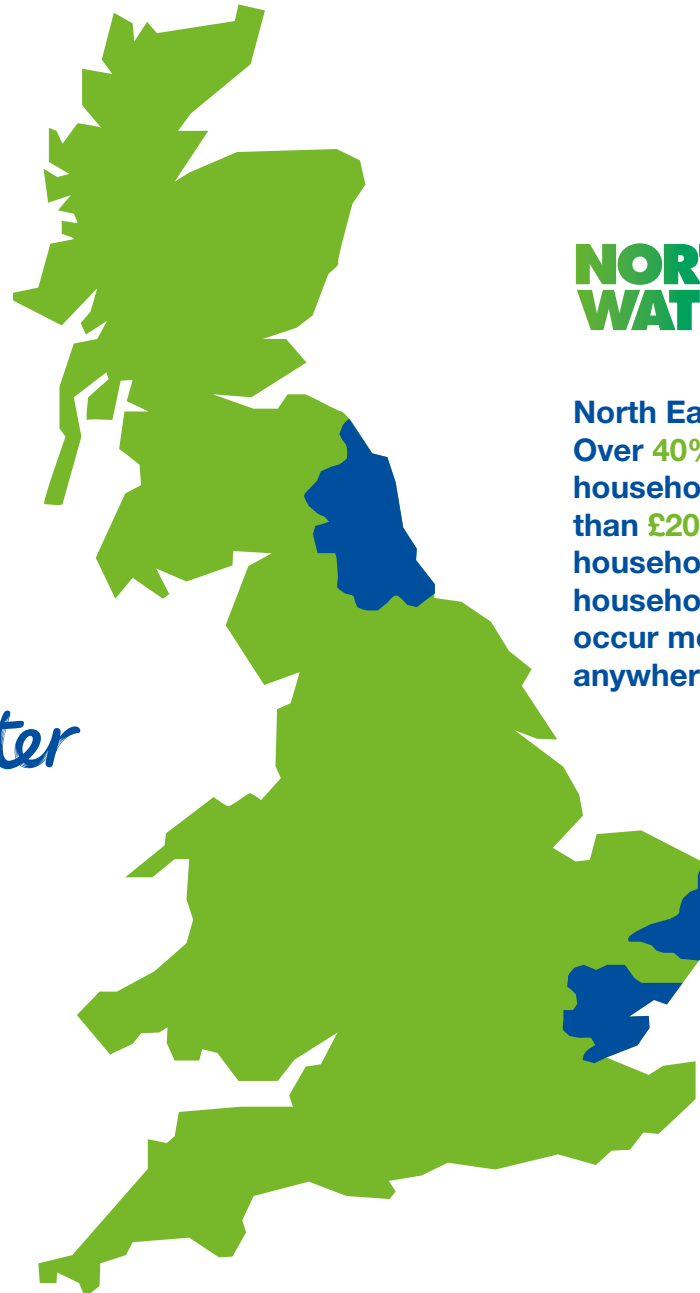
Co-creating this strategy

In developing this strategy we have involved customers who face financial, mobility and communication barriers, among others. We heard firsthand about what they consider to be unrivalled customer service.

ESSEX & SUFFOLK
WATER *living water*

Essex:
More than **123,000** people in Essex, including **40,000** children, live in areas that are in the **20%** most deprived in the UK.

Suffolk:
Several areas have the highest deprivation levels in the country.



NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

North East:
Over **40%** of the population lives in households with an income of less than **£20k**. More than **25%** of the households are socially rented, and households containing lone parents occur more in the North East than anywhere in Great Britain.

Our plan for 2025-30



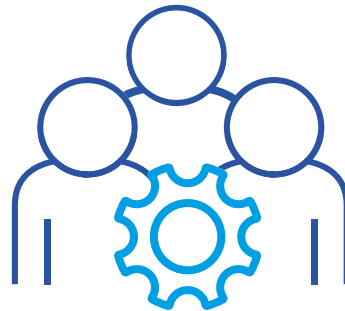
The headlines



Moving 500,000 households out of water poverty.



Over 250,000 customers registered for priority services.



Diversity and inclusion training to 100% of employees.

Every customer matters

Whether you need your bills in Braille, or help with payments, there are ways we can help.



- Financial support:** There are many ways we can help you, from payment plans and low income discounts to advice on saving water which can help lower your energy bills too. If you're struggling to pay your bills or falling into debt, please get in touch.



- Priority Services:** is a free service that could help you, your family, or friends. It helps us give you extra support when you need it. This could be due to age, disability, mobility, illness, mental health, communication needs, life changes (such as pregnancy) or if you have children under the age of five.

Ways we can help



Financial support



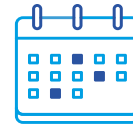
Flexible payment plan:

We can help you set up a payment plan with payments you can afford.



Reduced bill:

If there isn't enough money coming in to cover the most important bills, we may be able to lower your payments by up to **50%**.



Payment breaks:

We can offer payment breaks to help manage unexpected changes such as the loss of a job or unexpected changes in income.



Water Direct – using benefit payments:

Water Direct helps you pay bills directly from your benefits.



Low-income discount:

If your household has a low income or you receive Pension Credit, we may be able to offer up to **50%** off your water bills.



Bill cap scheme – WaterSure:

We may be able to cap our water bills if you have a water meter and: receive income related benefits, have a large family or a medical condition that uses lots of water.



Benefit checker:

We can check to see if you are receiving all the benefits you're entitled to.



Money and mental health advice:

We offer advice and support if you're feeling stressed and anxious about money.



Debt support:

We can refer you to free debt advice and support organisations to help manage your debts.

Ways we can help



Non-financial support



Stay safe in your home - set a password:

Protect your home from scammers and bogus callers. We'll use your chosen password when we call or visit, so you know it's really us.



Extra support:

You can let us know if you want more time to answer the phone or door if we call or visit you. We can also read your water meter if you find it difficult to take a reading.



Translation services:

If English is not your first language, we can provide a telephone interpreter. You can also translate our website by clicking language options at the bottom of the page.



Living with autism:

Carrying out works can be noisy and disruptive, where pre-planned we will give advanced notice so that customers can be prepared.



Water delivered to you if supply is interrupted:

We aim to restore your water within 3 hours, if it's off for longer we'll deliver it to you, if you have limited mobility or need water for medical needs during works.



Communicating with you in different formats:

We can send your bills and letters in large print, Braille and audio CD. We also offer Text Relay and British Sign Language video translation.



Nominate someone to manage your account:

You can nominate a carer, relative or family to manage your account. They can speak to us on your behalf and we can send them your bills and letters.



Cognitive impairment including dyslexia and dementia:

We can send bills to a trusted friend or family member or call to talk through the bill.

Priority Services Register

We want to make it as easy as possible to register for our Priority Services Register. We can do this directly with you, with a representative on your behalf or through securely shared data from partner organisations.

You can sign up with us in the following ways:



- **Website.**
- **Using our customer app.**
- **On webchat.**
- **Over the telephone.**
- **Using WhatsApp.**
- **On Facebook Messenger.**
- **Paper application forms (postage paid).**
- **Through trusted partners.**
- **In person.**
- **By email.**

When we add you to our register, we will ask you to share your individual circumstance that requires additional support, and which tailored services you require. We promise to keep this information safe and only use it to make sure we're giving you the support you need.

To help you get similar support from other organisations, like gas or electricity suppliers, we sometimes share this information with them. So, for example if there's a power cut, your electricity supplier can offer help.

However you register with us, we will send you a welcome letter to let you know how we will securely look after your data. This will also inform you about the extra support services we offer, including financial support.

We will contact customers on our Priority Services Register at least every two years to update their Priority Services Records. If you use our customer app you be prompted to update your records when you log on.

Website address
nwl.co.uk/priorityservices or
eswater.co.uk/priorityservices

Call us on:
 Northumbrian Water :
0345 733 5566
 Essex & Suffolk Water :
0345 782 0111

Details of how we look after customers personal information are at nwl.co.uk/psrprivacy or eswater.co.uk/psrprivacy



Support when there is an interruption to water supply

We know that an interruption to the water supply can impact customers, especially those who need the supply due to medical conditions or those who have limited mobility.

Where we have mobile phone numbers or email addresses for customers, we will contact them directly. We will use our social media platforms to spread the messages wider, and for major incidents we would work with local authorities and other emergency services to share messaging. We will use this opportunity to promote registration onto our [Priority Services Register](#).

For extended interruptions to supply, we will set up water stations in local community.

For customers who have let us know they cannot collect water or have a medical dependency where there is an extended interruption to supply over three hours, we will deliver bottled water to customers' homes.

We have dedicated people to help handle and manage situations where our business operations are disrupted.

We have enrolled over 250 employee volunteers to support our communities with delivery of bottled water and sharing messages where there is an interruption. They can support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

We complete a review after major incidents to understand how our customers have been impacted and how service can be improved.

Our plan for 2025-30

- Set up warm hubs in community centres with our local partners for events where there is a prolonged interruption affecting many customers. These will provide easy access to water, toilets and showering facilities and will be comfortable with heating, hot drinks, and food.
- Set robust measures for support and communications during incidents.



How to engage with us

We will continue to offer offering various contact methods for those who prefer non-digital contact, including home visits and community engagement, to ensure everyone can access our services. We're investing in more customer engagement vehicles for better community support.



We have:



Used **envelopes** as well as bills to promote the wide range of support available because some people don't open their bills.



Provided **Recite Me**, an accessibility toolbar, across all our website to allow for translation and tailoring of individual needs.



Launched **WhatsApp** as a contact channel.



Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

Support customers in moving to monthly electronic billing as part of our smart metering plan. This will help their understanding of the link between how much water they use and their bill and mean new home movers will receive their first bills more quickly.



Improve digital experiences by personalising customer information and using notifications to alert them about their water use.



Enhance digital features to give customers more control over payment plans and create tools to help them assess eligibility for services like discounts and metering.



Simplify online registration and access, allowing better account management and reducing the need to repeat information.



Use customer data to improve future digital services and ensure consistent messaging across all platforms.

Accreditations

We are delighted to have achieved BSI Accreditation for a second year demonstrating our focus on providing excellent service to customers in vulnerable circumstances.

We have also received accreditation for **Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark**, a national standard, independently recognising an organisation's achievement in customer service and its commitment to upholding those standards. **ServiceMark** is awarded based on customer satisfaction feedback and an assessment of employee engagement with our customer service strategy.

Every year we will:

- Achieve **BSI Kitemark** for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458 which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and that we are continually looking to improve and be innovative with the services we provide and how we provide them.



Website address
nwl.co.uk or
eswater.co.uk

Call us on:
 Northumbrian
 Water:
0345 733 5566

Essex &
 Suffolk Water:
0345 782 0111



Here to help: inclusive support for all your needs

We want our employees to have awareness of the broad range of needs our diverse customers have, and have tools to support or further signpost them to additional services. Key to this is delivering our Inclusivity Awareness training across our organisation.

Our online Inclusivity Awareness training has already been completed by over 300 of our frontline employees to give them the tools to identify customers in situations where we can offer further support.

This training programme is reinforced with coaching and best practice assessments. We run a detailed internal awareness campaign for all employees about the different types of circumstances customers may be in where we should offer extra help and support. It includes specialist training such as mental health awareness, loan shark training and suicide awareness.

Our plan for 2025-30

We will:

- Develop a comprehensive inclusivity training package with Northern Gas Networks and the National Energy Action group.
- Improve affordability training for personalised communication and solutions.
- Collaborate with the Alzheimer's Society to become a Dementia Friends company.
- Equip field teams with customer information and tools for support scheme sign-ups.
- Hold regular diversity and inclusion sessions for all employees and provide specialised training for recruiting managers.
- Enhance team understanding of diverse needs with a resource toolkit and use diversity networks for external engagement.

We use external data to understand our customers and target support as needs change. For example, we've mapped postcodes against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation to identify the most deprived neighbourhoods. This includes metrics on income, education, health, crime risk, housing access, and environment quality. We're also collaborating with Open Maps and energy providers to develop a tool for measuring community vulnerability.

We will continue to find ways to understand our customers' needs and how best to prepare for their changing needs in the future.



Next steps

This is our draft strategy and we will be carrying out research with customers, stakeholders (including Ofwat) and partners throughout 2024 to shape and improve our approach. Our final strategy will be published in June 2025.

Every year we will:

- Provide an up-to-date and detailed assessment of water poverty within our operating areas to track progress.
- Achieve BSI Kitemark for inclusive service - BS ISO 22458 which demonstrates that we provide services that are accessible for all and are continually looking to improve and be innovative with the services we provide and how we provide them.

By 2030 we will:

- Increase awareness of our Priority Services to **65%** and keep awareness at this level as a minimum.
- Contact **90%** of households which have at least one individual registered on the PSR every two years to make sure they are still receiving the right support.
- Have over **250,000** customers registered for priority services.
- Provide diversity and inclusion training to **100%** of new employees.
- Achieve equal levels of customer satisfaction between customers who need extra help and those who do not.

If any customers would like to take part in a customer discussion group, please email haveyoursay@nwl.co.uk by the end of October 2024. We would love to hear from you.

If you want to know more about anything covered in this summary, you can read our full Inclusivity Strategy [here](#).



