

# Your Water, Your Say – written record

Friday 10 November 2023 (17:00-19:00)



Water for the North West

This is a written record of the second 'Your water, your say' (YWYS) session held by United Utilities. It took place on Friday 10 November 2023 and was independently chaired by Kevin Johnson, jointly appointed by OFWAT and the Consumer Council for Water (CCW).

Present:

- Kevin Johnson, Independent Chair, OFWAT/CCW
- James Mackenzie, Policy Manager, CCW
- Louise Beardmore, Chief Executive, United Utilities
- James Bullock, Strategy, Policy and Regulation Director, United Utilities
- Mark Garth, Wastewater Services Director, United Utilities
- Mike Gauterin, Customer Service Director, United Utilities

A cross section of customers from across the North West and other stakeholder representatives attended the session online.

## Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the second YWYS open challenge session to give customers an opportunity to hear about the company's proposed business plan for 2025 to 2030 and to ask any questions about it.

The YWYS sessions were in addition to five county events held by the company in the lead up to the OFWAT/CCW prescribed event.

The Chair gave a brief introduction on proceedings and notified all present that the session was being recorded solely for the purposes of a written record and that the recording would be subsequently deleted once he, as independent chair, had agreed it.

The Chair was keen for participants to offer constructive challenge to the company about its business plan during the session.

He explained that questions would be taken under 4 categories. These were:

**Healthier** – for questions relating to water quality, leaks, supply interruptions, mains and pipes, smart meters and consumption, hose pipe ban, future supplies and water sources

**Stronger** – for questions relating to wastewater, sewage, overflows, flooding, pollution, bathing waters, river quality and shellfish beds

**Greener** – for questions relating to environmental impact, climate change, sustainability, carbon and net zero, restoring peatland, planting trees, improving biodiversity, population and housing growth

**Better** – for questions related to bills, affordability, customer services and complaints, supporting customers, priority services, investment, dividends, pay and bonuses

Please note that for the purposes of this write up, questions have been grouped under themes and topics to help with ease of reading and so do not necessarily reflect the order in which they were tabled in the session.

## Company Introductory Presentation

Chief Executive Louise Beardmore delivered a 15-minute presentation on the company's business plans for 2025 to 2030 and the presentation can be found on our website [here](#).

Targets in the 2025 – 2030 business plan include:

- Reduce the amount of water leakage by 13%
- Reducing consumption to 130 litres (per person per day)
- Reduce water quality contacts by 26%
- Reduce internal flooding incidents by 32%
- Reduce the impact of storm overflows – a 60% improvement in spill frequency compared to 2020
- Reducing carbon emission by at least 43%
- Provide a package of £525m of affordability support for customers struggling with their bills

The Chair then invited questions from attendees; these questions are grouped and detailed below, alongside further questions that were received prior to or by 10am on the Tuesday following the session, together with the responses from United Utilities representatives.

## HEALTHIER

**Q1. 74% of customers find the plan acceptable, 43% are concerned about affordability and only 22% said they will find the bill levels you're proposing affordable. Is the £500+ million extra you're allocating to help customers who struggle enough to make up that divide?**

We're in a cost-of-living crisis and everybody is feeling the impact of bills, inflation and the impact this is having on household incomes, as well as on businesses.

We weren't surprised to see the feedback that 43% of customers were concerned about affordability.

It also wasn't a surprise because in the North West, we have a really big divergence in terms of the customer's abilities to pay. We've got some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the North West.

The £525 million support package we've put on the table is the biggest support package. It will enable us to help 590,000 customers, or one in 6 customers.

We're already helping 230,000 customers, so this is going to see us help a significant amount more, an additional 330,000 more than we're supporting today.

Importantly, these are not just schemes for customers who are in debt. Help is also available for customers who are struggling in terms of budget management, or for those who may find themselves in a temporary situation where they can't afford the bills.

We've endeavoured to design a comprehensive package, not a one size fits all approach. This means we can adapt the support available according to the circumstances that customers find themselves in.

I also think it's important to mention that United Utilities shareholders are putting in £200 million of support as well. This is the biggest contribution in the country and that's because we recognise that we need to do more to help customers here in the North West.

**Q2. Bonuses being paid to water company CEOs has been in the news this week. Will you take less of a bonus than you're entitled to if this plan is not being delivered?**

United Utilities executives waived some of their bonuses this year, and we've changed remuneration so that we will be remunerated on the things that matter such as combined sewer spills, environmental performance and leakage. We think it's extremely important that there is absolute transparency and traceability between performance and pay.

**Q3. Is the water you deliver to 1.4 million customers not currently of the highest quality? How are you going to improve water quality?**

Water quality is something that is set and regulated by the Drinking Water Inspectorate, which has very strict and clear guidance and rules.

What we're doing is improving the quality of the water that we provide by strengthening two specific aqueducts - one that comes from Cumbria down into Manchester and another that takes water from Lake Vyrnwy in Wales up into Merseyside.

Specifically, we're strengthening the pipework and the treatment processes with a particular focus on water discoloration, as customers in those areas can sometimes experience this issue. These improvements will also allow us to safeguard water supplies for the future in the face of climate change.

Importantly, we also need to move water around. Water from separate areas have different tastes and are blended differently. We're ensuring that we have the right water with the correct blend and quality for years going forward.

We want to assure everybody that water quality is something that's very heavily regulated and very heavily sampled. We pride ourselves on the quality of water that we deliver in the North West.

**Q4. I'm from Cumbria, and as you said we have lots of water in the North West. I've also lived in other countries where there isn't a lot of water. It seems ridiculous to me coming back to this country that we are flushing our toilets with treated water, and it costs money to treat water. I heard that there was some research going into rainwater capture for flushing toilets. I would like to know more about this because the biggest thing on most people's bills is what goes down the toilet.**

Water reduction is the first step in improving our rivers and environment. If we can reduce the amount of water that we are using, including flushing down the toilet, we can also reduce how frequently combined sewer overflows operate.

To achieve this, we must focus on how we build new homes to design in water reduction systems and we're already working with new housing developers to facilitate this, as well as with schools and with businesses.

In Lancashire schools, we've been installing huge industrial size water butts that are collecting water which can be recycled. The butts are linked to our control room in Warrington so if we know there is going to be a big storm, we can release the water providing more capacity to store water and reduce flooding risk.

We've included 75,000 home water efficiency audits in this plan, which will provide customers with advice about water recycling in their home and help them ensure that their homes are as water efficient as possible.

**Q5. Does United Utilities rely on rainwater almost exclusively for water provision? Given climate change, have you considered other water sources such as desalinated sea water?**

We've highlighted additional water sources in the plan, and we've identified several boreholes that we will be bringing into the supply system in the North West.

We are witnessing changes in water patterns and more importantly in rainfall, particularly in Cheshire and across towards the Pennines. Our plan on water resources goes up to 2050 and it's extremely important to plan for the long term both in terms of the ecology of how the environment is changing, and population growth.

There is one desalination plant in the UK, in the south of England. Desalination is something we continue to look at but it's extremely expensive to operate, and the process of treating seawater is quite difficult. It is also very power intensive, so we need to consider the impact on the environment.

**Q6. Why has your water got so much chlorine in it? It tastes horrible, there's limescale in the kettle and you can't drink it.**

Chlorine is used to treat drinking water and it is necessary to ensure that water is safe to drink. It isn't harmful, but some people are more sensitive to the taste and smell of chlorine than others.

In the UK, all our public water supplies have to be disinfected by law and that is really important because chlorine plays the role of destroying any bacteria which might be harmful to health.

It is added at the final stage of water treatment to kill any harmful germs that might be present. Concentrations of chlorine are very, very closely monitored, 24 hours a day and we keep them as low as possible whilst delivering against all our safety requirements.

Chlorine concentrations at customer's taps can vary throughout the day for various reasons and in relation to where homes are situated in relation to the treatment works.

If we can get in contact with the customer, we can have a look and understand if there's any issues.

#### **Q7. Why are chemicals like fluoride added into our water?**

Fluoride is tasteless, odourless and invisible. Some water supplies naturally contain fluoride if they originate from sources that are underground where there are rocks and minerals that are prone to higher levels of fluoride.

North West water supplies are naturally very low in fluoride. We're predominantly reservoir fed, and water normally contains less than 0.2 milligrams of fluoride per litre, which is very low.

The decision to put fluoride in the water rests with the Secretary of State. It is not a decision taken by water companies but something we must comply with.

We are only required to add fluoride in a small number of areas. There's no fluoride added in Merseyside, Lancashire or Manchester. We have a legal requirement to add fluoride to water in parts of Cumbria and areas around Crewe, Cheshire.

#### **Q8. United Utilities is one of the worst performing companies when it comes to sewage spills. Even by your plans, you're still going to be struggling comparatively with other companies. Is a 60% spill reduction target ambitious enough?**

Yes. We have more combined sewer overflow spills than any other company in the country. In the North West, we have a huge pipe network - enough wastewater pipes to go around the world twice. We also have higher levels of rainfall than elsewhere in the country and higher levels of combined sewers.

Currently, we're at 35 spills per combined sewer overflow and we were at 59 in 2020. A big step change that's already been delivered, a 39% reduction.

However, we need to go further and faster. Essentially that means doing 3 things:

- **Reducing** the amount of water in the system
- **Removing** surface water, by ensuring we're using less
- **Re-plumbing** across the North West region

It's going to take time, and I know that there is going to be people on this call that may say, 'I can see that you have the biggest plan in the country, but can't you go faster?'

One of the biggest challenges we have is that we can't just turn everything off while we do the work. This isn't just like building a new road where you can divert the traffic. We must continue to make sure that we treat sewage and do that properly and safely.

This plan is going to see us work on over 430 CSOs overflows across the North West. We're investing £3.1 billion and it's the biggest plan of its kind in the sector. In terms of ambition, we've really challenged and stretched ourselves.

This will see us working on CSOs up and down the North West region. This is a huge amount of construction and intervention at the same time as delivering that service. Our target is no more than 10 spills<sup>1</sup> per combined sewer overflows by 2050 but we are challenging and stretching ourselves to go as fast as we can and I'm confident that as we get into this programme, we will start to see efficiencies and opportunities for how we can do this faster. It's a really ambitious programme and it isn't without its challenges.

#### **Q9. When will you stop pumping sewage into Lakes Coniston and Windermere?**

Our plan is very ambitious. It includes £3.1 billion of investment focused specifically on storm overflows including combined sewer overflows and storm tank overflows. We've accelerated some of this already, which means we're already delivering against some of those investments.

We've reduced the frequency that storm overflows operate by 39% since 2020 and the plan will take us to a 60% reduction by the end of the regulatory period (2030).

Windermere and the Lake District is one of our focus areas. We know that local residents, people from across the North West and the entire country value the Lake District, so it is a very, very high priority area.

At the moment, there are 4 overflows that discharge into Lake Windermere, and we're already working to improve this. All information on our plans to invest in overflows will be available on the DEFRA website, and on our own website, by the end of the year.

The information will clearly show exactly where and when we're making the investments and improvements out to 2050 so customers can understand what's happening in their area.

#### **Q10. Will the water in Coniston and Windermere be made safe for swimming in?**

There are already 4 bathing water areas in Windermere currently classified as excellent by the Environment Agency. The new classifications will be published on 1 December and we're very hopeful that they'll retain their excellent status.

We are also engaged with a local swimming club in Coniston for a potential designation of a bathing water there.

We're extremely passionate about improving the environment in the rivers and lake quality across the North West and that's what our ambitious plan will deliver.

#### **Q11. Can you replace the combined sewer systems with a separate pipe system in Windermere? What are you doing to invest in Lake Windermere?**

Unfortunately, the cost and the physical disruption of putting in a separate pipe system would be too extreme. However, we are looking at what it would mean to take a particularly innovative approach to Lake Windermere. It's a World Heritage site, and an area that a lot of people are passionate about.

Therefore, we have been undertaking some work to assess a future vision for a "discharge free" Lake Windermere, in which nobody discharges anything into the lake. At present there are 200 discharge points<sup>2</sup> of which 44 belong to us.

Starting last summer, we've set ourselves a challenge to understand what it would take to achieve such a vision. We've taken Lake Annecy in France<sup>3</sup> as an example and consulted with water colleagues in Canada where they have similar systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Target clarified to be no more than 10 spills per overflow per year rather than just 10 spills

<sup>2</sup> The 200 discharge points are across the Windermere catchment, not directly into Lake Windermere

<sup>3</sup> Corrected from session where it was incorrectly said that Annecy is in Switzerland

Consequently, we now have some ideas of how we could approach a new solution at Lake Windermere involving a 67-kilometre pipeline that would collect everything on both sides of the Lake. This would then be transported south, down to a new treatment works at Grange-over-Sands. It would be a huge project and unlike anything else that we've done in the UK previously.

There would be a need for a coalition of the willing, involving a collaboration of a number of parties such as MPs, and non-governmental organisations.

In the New Year, we're going to share some of our initial thinking, revealing what this new solution could look like for the UK.

In the meantime, we remain committed to reducing the number of times that combined sewer overflows that go into Lake Windermere.

**Q12. Why are you only reducing leakage by 13%? Surely more reduction would benefit everyone, including United Utilities in the long run?**

We have already been working hard to reduce leakage by a third over the past 30 years and our target is to reduce by a further 15% by 2025 – so the 13% target is in addition to all of those improvements we've already made. By 2050, our target is a 50% reduction in leakage.

In terms of leakage, 70% comes from our pipes and 30% of leakage comes from customers' homes and gardens. That's why we're focusing on replacing our pipes and increasing our leakage activity and making sure that we're putting in new technology and new capability so we can understand proactively where those leaks are and fix them.

To give you an indication, we fix about 660 leaks a week which is the equivalent of 17 Olympic size swimming pools!

Metering and home audits will help us address 30% of leakage that comes from customer properties. As a water company, we recognise that customers sometimes need financial support, and therefore we do offer a free customer leak repair service.

**Q13. What percent of your budget is allocated to helping people reduce leakage in their homes?**

The 900,000 smart meters we will be deploying to customers over the proposed period equates to around £600 million worth of investment. They will provide the customer with real time information about their water consumption, and they will also report on any leakage in the customer's premises.

Repair of customer side leaks is not United Utilities responsibility; however, we'll present that information to customers and provide support where we can.

At the moment, meters provide 2 readings a year. The big difference is that smart meters will provide readings up to every 15 minutes, arming the customer with real-time data to inform them if they need to take any action on matters such as leaks.

**Q14. Will smart meters be free of charge to the customer?**

Yes. Currently we offer a free meter option, which you can apply for today and smart meter installation will also be free of charge when we roll that out in 2025. We will have a rolling period of upgrades of the existing meters as part of the smart meter plan.

In the North West, we have one of the highest propensities of electricity and gas pre-payment meters and sometimes customers are concerned that if they have a water meter, and fall into financial difficulty, we could disconnect their supply. Importantly, we promise that we cannot, and we would not ever operate that way.

To give customers confidence if they'd like to move to a meter, we've introduced a scheme called the Lowest Bill Guarantee.

It is free to have the smart meter installed and we commit that we won't charge customers more than they are currently paying as they get used to having the meter. It will then be the customer's choice whether they want to move to a meter permanently.

Our overarching aim is to help customers feel more confident about smart meters as they hopefully witness a reduction in their bills as well as a reduction in their water usage.

**Q15. What is the advantage of a smart meter?**

A meter will help you save money on your water bills. On average, our data show us that people with meters save around £150 a year on their water bill because they can get an accurate measure of how much water they are consuming.

Smart meters differ from older meters because they increase visibility of that consumption. Customers can see how much they're consuming on a more real-time basis, rather than just twice per year.

We are also holding co-creation groups, talking to customers about what they want to see in that consumption data. This information will be available to customers before the smart meter roll out begins.

**Q16. Does a smart meter need to be plugged in all the time like a smart meter for gas and electricity consumption?**

No. The smart meter is situated on the water pipe and powered by the water itself. Customers receive the information generated by the meter via the app, a printed bill, or via a display. This means customer have an easy way of seeing how much water they're using.

**Q17. Water companies have been privatised for 34 years. Why do you want OFWAT to allow you to raise customer bills now?**

One of the things that we're very clear about in our plan is that we're not asking customers to pay a second time for something that we've already committed to do.

The money that we're asking OFWAT to grant in terms of bill increases is for new investments, new service standards, and new environmental standards.

**Q18. 20% of our water bills already covers United Utilities' interest payments and shareholder dividends, is it fair to ask for more?**

Debt and equity shareholders allow us to spend the money needed to deliver improvements right away, and then spread the cost of those improvements over a long period of time, that's why we have to pay interest.

It's a bit like a mobile phone contract, or a mortgage, whereby you pay a little bit every month, or every year, in order to meet the cost of the asset, but you can enjoy that asset right away.

**STRONGER**

**Q19. Why is your overflow reduction percentage target only 60%?**

Historically, investment in sewage overflows has been based on environmental harm. That's something that we've worked very closely with the Environment Agency on, and it's not been based on a specific number of spills.

In the North West we get 28% more rainfall than the rest of the country, so we have a starting point that's further away from the new legislative requirement. We need to get from where we are now, to 10 spills per overflow by 2050.

In 2020, we were at 59 spills per overflow so it's a very large jump to get down from 59 to 10. Consequently, we think that a 60% improvement by the end of 2030<sup>4</sup> is actually a significant chunk of the way towards where we need to get to by 2050.

This involves an investment of around £3.1 billion and that's the most significant investment programme we think for 100 years - and possibly ever in the North West.

The challenge of delivering this, making sure that we get all of that investment completed and those environmental improvements done in the 5-year period, is probably what limits our ability to go further. Nonetheless, we've already started. This plan doesn't get formally endorsed until 2025 but we're already on the ground now, making those improvements and we're seeking out the opportunities to accelerate some of those improvements further.

It's a 60% ambition right now. We think that's really challenging, but we're seeking out the opportunities to go further and faster if we can.

**Q20. Why do you need to wait for legislation, quotas, and targets? Why have you not been leading as an industry, and as a company?**

We're not waiting around. We've already delivered a 39% reduction since 2020 and we've done that through a series of short-term operational interventions to get the environmental improvement now, so hopefully customers will be confident that we take this really seriously.

But that needs to be followed up with a resilient process. We are going as fast as we can to make the improvements but because these assets will be in the ground for perhaps 100 years or more, we need to make sure that they last.

**Q21. Who is responsible for keeping the storm drains clear of sand in coastal Lancashire? I have lived on a street where they filled up completely with sand. It didn't have anywhere to go, and it all flooded into my garden. So, 3 or 4 times a year I would get a garden full of sewage.**

If they are solely surface water drains, it's very likely that they are owned by either the highways authority or the local authority. If they are foul drains, or combined sewer overflows, it's likely they will be owned by us.

What makes it more complex is that often these systems connect into each other, so there can be mixed ownership and collective responsibility.

We've worked, and are continuing to work, very hard to build partnerships with the lead local flood authorities and other local authorities and stakeholders across the North West to identify where it's opportune for us to take on the accountability for those maintenance activities, where others are responsible for those activities, and crucially where we can support each other to make sure that those activities are carried out.

We've got £250 million in the plan for this. It will help us to identify where surface water connects into our combined systems and where there might be opportunities to remove it. We can separate out surface water, put that through a sustainable, nature-based solution to treat it in a different way. That then limits the amount of flooding, but also the amount of water that discharges from overflows.

**Q22. One aspect that has been missing is the flooding in coastal areas due to blocked rainwater drains. What is being done for these areas? Hoylelake is an example where stagnant main water is undermining walls and creating a mosquito problem that did not exist before.**

Surface water management is a very complex subject and there are mixed accountabilities depending on the specific assets, but we are working very closely with authorities across the North West.

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<sup>4</sup> Corrected in this write up to align with the presentation and show that the 60% reduction is between 2020 and 2030, not 2025 to 2030



We already have an [Integrated Water Management Plan](#) that has been developed in partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and we're at the early stages of developing exactly the same for the Liverpool City Region which Hoylake will fall into.

The plan aims to connect all the relevant authorities who own all of these assets and make sure that water is being managed in an integrated and joined up way. Our customers expect us to do that, and they can have confidence that we are working very hard to join up and make that seamless. In regard to the situation at Hoylake, we would be very happy to take that away and come back to you.

**Q23. My question relates to the overflows that have polluted our rivers for the past 30 years and the apology that the water companies have made, and the apologies that United Utilities have made in the last 12 months, on more than one occasion. Are we to expect OFWAT and the Environment Agency will also apologise for their failure to properly regulate for the last 30 years the dreadful pollution that has been caused to our rivers because they are the regulators and their failures have allowed the water companies to pump filth into our rivers.**

**Kevin Johnson:** OFWAT will be holding its own version of this meeting next year. There's a survey where you can tell them what you think about the company's plans, which is live. All I will say is that Lou and the team are not here to answer for either OFWAT or the Environment Agency. The company is here to answer for their plans for the next 5 years. I will say the company is to answer the part of the question about why is it only in the last year an apology has come?

**United Utilities:** We have been very clear that we understand, and we share people's concerns. And we are sorry that we haven't acted quickly, or more importantly, sooner. But what we can do is give you the assurances of how seriously we have taken it, and more importantly, not just said sorry but have put plans in place.

These are the biggest plans across the UK to address the challenges that we have with combined sewer overflows in the North West, and it can't be fixed overnight. There's lots of commentary about the fact that we 'dump sewage' and it's hugely emotive and we get it, we understand it, and we want to see it reduced too.

But it is going to take time. We're going to have to re-plumb the system and similar to the transition from diesel to electric cars, it is going to take time. We are extremely committed to drive that step change that everybody wants to see in the North West and to hold ourselves to account.

We want to be more transparent about this, and we plan to publish live data at the end of this year<sup>5</sup> that will give you the ability to see every single storm overflow here in the North West. It will show you when it's discharging, for how long, and more importantly, it will do that in near real time because we want to ensure transparency and visibility and hold ourselves to account in terms of making the step change we want.

**Q24: We suffer often from flooding on our street in South Liverpool. In the event of a flood, the water rises very quickly and lingers regardless of rainfall. Eventually when it does drain away, it drains very quickly. Can you explain why this happens, please?**

There are a variety of reasons why the pipe drains quickly or slowly depending on the hydraulics in the system and we will need the full details of that. We'll come out to you and do that review so we can understand what's draining into your system and that'll give us a better view of what's going on and more importantly what we need to do.

**Q25: I'm from the Eden Catchment area and this is one of the areas that's profoundly affected by the new nutrient neutrality bombshell which hit us last year. I have sympathy with you because you are sharing our pain over this requirement, and I believe that you are legally required to update your wastewater treatment plants such that they do not add to the nutrient load in rivers. The problem for local authorities is that we can't pass planning permission until the developers have demonstrated that they will not add any nutrient load. In this area housebuilding has ground to a halt, builders are having to lay off staff and it is a serious issue for the locality. I'd like to ask you to reassure me that in addressing the wastewater treatment plants, they will include the small ones which are in very sparsely populated areas? <sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> This date is likely to be early next year rather than by the end of 2023

<sup>6</sup> Some additional information has been added to this written response to provide more details

Eden Valley is very high on the agenda from a nutrient neutrality perspective. Our plans do include all of the nutrient neutrality investment that is required. The nutrient neutrality legislation affects a relatively small number of sites as it is only targeted at large treatment works. So, across Cumbria this will result in investment at 7 wastewater treatment works, 6 of which are in the Eden Valley. The total investment for P in areas impacted by NN in Cumbria is £243m if you want to quote that.

In addition to this, over the last several years we have been investigating the impact our discharges are having across Cumbria and have developed a further programme to deliver phosphorus improvements at an additional 35 wastewater treatment works. This will reduce the impact of them in the local environment in line with meeting our contribution to the required improvement in line with the Habitats Regulations. Through these investigations we assessed the impact of all our treatment works within the designated areas and I can assure you our plan includes the smallest of treatment plants, where required, in addition to the six nutrient neutrality projects.

Further still, the Petteril catchment is the first regionally significant catchment permit, meaning a number of the smaller wastewater treatment works are permitted not just by the quality of effluent from the site, but also for an amount of phosphorus that we remove from the surrounding catchment land. So, not only are we focusing on delivering appropriate investment in smaller treatment works but we're also working with farmers, stakeholders and other third parties to drive down nutrients, particularly phosphate across the catchment. In 2025-2030, we have learnt from this approach and will be delivering in the same way at a further 9 sites across Cumbria.

**Q26. I took up wild swimming 2 years ago, which I've mainly done up in Cumbria. Over the last 12 months, I've been going down to New Brighton and what I found is that a lot of people are saying it's not safe to swim there due to anecdotal information coming back to say that they've had problems such as gastro problems. I've looked on the Environment Agency website and some of the monitoring is quite old, so I don't know if I'm looking in the right place. But is it safe to swim there or not?**

We are not in a position to give you advice on whether it is safe to swim or not. The Environment Agency, however, are in that position. They have a duty to protect public health and their Swimfo website will give you information on whether it is or isn't safe to swim.

The pollution risk forecasts created on the Swimfo website do take account of the likelihood of a storm overflow occurring because that is one of the factors that might influence bathing water quality. Those pollution risk forecasts also take account of, for example, agricultural runoff or other third-party pollution sources.

It's important to take advice from the Environment Agency. As we said earlier, before the end of the year we will be publishing live data on whether our overflows are discharging or not<sup>7</sup>. It will be real time to within 1 hour and in many cases that will be to within 15 minutes. The public will be able to view when a CSO is discharging or has discharged.

We're also working with New Brighton Swimming Group and the Blue Tits looking at what we can do around rainwater management. The bathing waters are rated as excellent in your specific area, and we're always continuing to try and make those improvements.

## GREENER

**Q27. What plans have you made for building new water treatment plants for an ever-increasing number of dwellings in your area of responsibility?**

There's a number of new treatment works that are being built as part of this plan. One of the things that we're doing as part of that, both in terms of bringing on new water sources treatment capability, is strengthening our aqueducts and building new water supply systems. That will see us bring into supply an additional 22 million litres of water between 2025 and 2030.

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<sup>7</sup> This date is likely to be early next year rather than by the end of 2023

There are three specific water treatment works that we're going to be focusing on and increasing specifically. They're in the Cheshire area because that's the area where we're seeing the biggest changes in terms of water demand.

If you have a look at our plans on the [website](#) and specifically the county-based plans you can see where that investment is happening.

**Q28. Is there a system available to enable customers to link used wash or bath water to flush toilets? Could keeping up the pumping of water from former mines help with flooding and lowering the water table?**

One of the things that we've been looking at, particularly in terms of flood management and managing surface water, is whether we could be utilising disused quarries and other areas for more natural-based solutions. For example, how we could use swales, and something called attenuation tanks to use that water more effectively.

One of the things that we're doing specifically in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority area, where we have an [Integrated Water Management Plan](#), is to see how we can conduct specific activities that actually reduce surface water flooding. We're putting in permeable driveways, building or installing avenues of trees with recycling systems attached to them.

There are some real opportunities, particularly in the Greater Manchester area, where we can look at some of the existing infrastructure - and that might be, as the customer suggested, old mines or quarries - that could be used particularly to help with flooding.

**Q29. I'm from the Liverpool City area and I'm representing Youth Focus North West today, a board that coordinates youth work in the region. Climate change and being greener is very important for young people. How are you going to ensure that young people are considered in your engagement because customers are often prioritised, and sessions like this are not very accessible to young people? How can you make sure they're involved and properly represented in the future?**

We think it's really important that we make sure that we have young peoples' voices reflected through the plan. We've worked hard to make sure that we reach out to young people. We've been running a series of focus groups and drop-in sessions with future bill payers and targeting young people, using the North West Youth Parliament<sup>8</sup> in particular is a way of gaining that input.

But to be really honest, we'd like to talk to you after today's event because we want some ideas! We've been working hard with the Youth Parliament but there's more we could be doing and, you're absolutely right, it's really, really important that we're engaging young people and we're keen to understand more, because you'll have better ideas than us.

## **BETTER**

**Q30. Why does United Utilities sponsor, at what I assume is at an enormous expense, the local weather reports? I assume no one has any choice but to use your services. How much does this cost per year?**

The reason for this sponsorship and advertising in general is that it provides an opportunity to send out important messages and there are two specific things that we've been focusing on. The first is around our Stop the Block campaign. This is where you'll see the young person that we work with, called Carter, encouraging customers to bin wet wipes, rather than put them in the toilet, which can cause blockages.

We also message around water efficiency to encourage customers to use less water in the shower and when they're cleaning their teeth. We also have other messages around being "winterwise". This helps customers to ensure that they've insulated pipes to stop leaks and bursts that can occur when it's poor weather. We use lots of different channels to advertise, that might be TV or radio, and it's about £250,000 a year for that combined investment. Stop The Block is a great example as to why it's important to make this investment. If you look at the amount of money

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<sup>8</sup> And the organisation that sits behind the Youth Parliament, known as Youth Focus

that we spend on going out and removing blockages that have been caused by wet wipes or fats, oils, and greases, it's in the range of about £15 million to £20 million. So, the more we can do to educate customers about making sure those things don't go down the toilet, the more it reduces cost in the long term. We don't do it needlessly and we focus it on specific areas to make sure that we're communicating key messages.

**Q31. I'm with the Clean River Kent campaign in Cumbria. We've struggled to read the draft business plan. We've given it quite a lot of time because we believe it to be a critical document shaping the next 5 years. It's a very hard read. It's full of acronyms. There is a glossary, but it's right at the end of the list of attachments and it's not labelled as a glossary. So, it's 299 pages long with 90 attached documents which are numerically labelled, rather than labelled by name. It's quite a hostile document for a non-expert. Could it be made more accessible next time round? I also don't understand how the money works. How do you assess what finances you can raise, where you're likely to raise them from, what the debt is going to cost you, and then decide how much you can invest?**

Sometimes these things can be detailed and one of the reasons that we've been coming to community groups, and we're more than happy to come to the Clean River Kent group - which we know is a really active group - is so that we can talk to you, provide the detail and information, and more importantly have very open conversations, discussions, and debate.

We can arrange this as we're really keen to not just come along and have a conversation, but to come with the local plan so you can see what we're planning to do, and when, and have more of an opportunity to engage.

Regarding the layout of the plan, there are 10 chapters in the plan, and each sets out which of those 90 documents relate to each chapter and what's contained within them.

If there are particular things that you're trying to get out of the plan, and you want some help with that, please drop us a line and we'll be very happy to point you to the relevant sections or to extract those for you.

In terms of how we finance the plan, and how that works, we don't start from a standpoint of how much money we have to spend and where can that go. We start with the requirements. What do customers tell us is important to them? What do legislation and environmental requirements tell us is important? What does the Drinking Water Inspectorate want us to deliver in terms of the water quality?

We always start with the statutory requirements and the customer preferences, and we then consider what we can realistically deliver in a 5-year period. Only then do we start to look at how much that would cost.

When we think about how much it would cost, we must think about 2 things. We have to think about how much money we could raise from investors, or borrow, in order to fund that investment, and then we have to think about how that gets repaid and translate that into customer bills. The price review process is an ongoing process over many years. It's a consistent and continuous triangulation of all those things: What are the requirements? How much would it cost to invest? What would be the impact on bills?

Then we consider this several times to try and make it better. Often, the first answer that we get to meet customer preferences isn't the most efficient. So, then we consider if there might be a better way, which might cost less and also have less environmental impact.

We work through that process over a number of years, and a lot of that is the consultations that we've been doing to run these plans through with customers - about 95,000 in total.

Where we are now is that OFWAT, and the regulators, are reviewing these proposals. They have to go through every one of those documents on the website, and a number of spreadsheets that sit alongside that, and they are going through and challenging us in terms of: Have we got the priorities right? Have we listened to customers? Have we got the costs right? At the end of that process, they will determine what they think is the right balance of that plan.

I'm sure they will have some challenges to put to us, and we will want to follow through with these. After this, we will then approach the capital markets to raise the financing.

We are confident that it is a financeable plan. We've thought very carefully about what goes into the plan, the pace of our ambition, what we can realistically deliver and what we can realistically raise from the market.

**Q32. I know with considerable reference what you're planning to do, but with no reference to your profits. Of the £1.52 shown in your glass of water, how much in the glass is market profits?**

It's difficult to say how it translates into the glass of water, but the profit after tax last year was about £80 million at United Utilities and that was on £1.8 billion of revenue. So, the profits that are left at the end of the process are relatively limited. The sort of returns that investors receive, whether through debt or equity, is around a 4% return. The vast majority of the money that we get through bills is going into funding services and making new investments.

**Q33. I'm ashamed to say I'm a very small shareholder in this company. I wish to go on record that I would rather you didn't pay me, or anyone else a dividend, and instead you concentrated on not dumping sewage into water courses. Can you give me any assurance that a clean safe environment is top of your priorities?**

We know that all shareholders in the company are very concerned about the environment, and environmental performance. One of the reasons why they want to invest in a company like ours is because they see it as a very good steward of the environment, and they want to help fund environmental improvements going forward. Shareholders are very, very important enablers of all this environmental improvement and environmental investment that we want to make.

In the 30 years since privatisation, we have invested around £22.6 billion to deliver both customer service and environmental improvements. Included in our business plan submission is a document called "Assurance and Track Record" which provides evidence of our track record in delivering on our promises in the current five-year investment period, several of which are linked to improving the environment. More information can be found in section 10.4 onwards in the following document on our website:

[https://pr24.unitedutilities.com/pdfs/UUW10\\_chapter\\_10.pdf](https://pr24.unitedutilities.com/pdfs/UUW10_chapter_10.pdf)

Looking ahead, we will continue to invest significant sums to improve the water environment across the North West. For example, in our plan we propose to spend £3.1 billion to reduce spills at over 430 CSOs overflows and a further £3 billion to reduce the amount of nutrients in the wastewater we return to the environment after it has been treated.

**Q34. Given that water really is a necessity, and in these pressing financial times, might it not be a requirement that finance for the various aspects of the functioning of United Utilities water and the provision of services to end users takes precedence over paying shareholders a dividend? A predecessor Steve Mogford earned £2.3 million in 2017, which would take a current prime minister some 15 years to earn. Is that equitable?**

What we're very clear about is that executive pay needs to be linked to outcomes for customers. One of the things that we've done is changed the balance of those payments so over 60% of payments are linked to outcomes for customers and for the environment.

The weighting is very much placed in that direction, as opposed to just on things like profit or shareholder return. This is really important. The other key element is transparency.

As a listed business, we are very transparent in what people are paid, the targets that are set out, and also when we are doing the right thing. So, one of the things that Steve Mogford did last year, recognising the conversation around environmental performance, was to waive that element of bonus.

We have been very clear as we go forward what we want our remuneration to be based on and that's on the things that customers have told us are important – because we went out and asked them.

So that's leakage, sewage, bills, it's on environmental performance, and it's on service. It is about transparency, and it's got to be linked to performance for the entire executive team.

To give you those assurances, the weighting is based on customer and environmental outcomes as opposed to financial returns just for shareholders.

**Q35. How are you going to identify which customers are going to receive a support package?**

We have over 200,000 customers on support packages at the moment and I'd like to reiterate our support package doesn't take a one size fits all approach.

For example, it could be pensions - the customer may have excess voluntary charges. It could be they just want to take a payment break or do payment matching. The assessment we do is based on individual customer circumstances.

We have an affordability package which is industry leading. We know we want to support around 600,000 customers in the next business plan period and, from our modelling, and we're going to be advertising and reaching out to the customers who we think will benefit.

What we would ask is that customers ring in and talk through their personal circumstances and we'll see which tariff applies to them and their situation. It really doesn't depend on being in debt. It depends on individual circumstances.

Our support package is substantial, our schemes are very substantial as well. We have trained colleagues all based in the North West who are ready to take customer calls and help them determine what's the most appropriate support for them.

**Q36. Can you ask how much United Utilities has paid in dividends and how much they've invested since 1989?**

That's going back quite a long way. I'm not sure I've got those figures and there's been a number of corporate transformations since then. For a while, United Utilities wasn't just a water company, it was also an energy company in the region.

What I can tell you is approximately the amount of dividends we pay now. The amount does vary a little bit, year to year, but it's around £300 million and around the same again in terms of interest payments.

That's on what we call a regulatory capital value, an investment to date of around £12 billion. That again is around that level of 4% or so, roughly the same interest that you would be paying on a mortgage, and that's the base levels of returns that our investors are receiving.

**Q37. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries. What are you doing for biodiversity? And are you planting trees to reduce flooding?**

Around 40% of our Storm Overflow programme, £3.1 billion of investment will include some element of nature-based solution. So, that's creating some kind of habitat for the local ecology, whilst at the same time treating sewers.

We are planting a million trees in this regulatory period, for a variety of reasons, including flood management. There's £250 million in this plan to explore the opportunities for surface water removal and tree pits, for example, are a very large part of that.

We've also developed a baseline for the North West in terms of something called natural capital, so we can understand the biodiversity of the region and of those projects and activities that we're proposing to do. There is a huge amount in the plan that's about biodiversity, peatland and upland restoration, and carbon capture.

We can make sure you get some of that information. We also have specific outreach teams and catchment teams as well. So, we can come and talk to you, or perhaps an interest group, specifically about what we're doing.

**Independent Chair's Closure**

The Chair closed the session, thanking all delegates for their participation. They were reminded that all the questions submitted would be shared with United Utilities and any questions not asked in the session would be answered within the meeting notes.

He also reminded participants they could submit further questions to CCW within 24 working hours of this session (set at 10am on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November) and it will be treated as if it was a question given in this session.

The Chair informed those in the session that United Utilities will share a copy of the session notes and presentation on its [website](#).

He also noted that OFWAT is also holding its own version of Your water, your say in 2024 to give people the opportunity to test the draft determinations on the investment plans and pricing controls. He said OFWAT will ask United Utilities to share the details of the event with everyone who attended the YWYS session.

## Questions not answered during the session

The following section includes our response to questions we received in advance of, during or after the meeting, but did not have time to answer during the session. In some cases, we asked customers to provide contact details so we could follow up on their question outside of the session – where we have received these contact details, we have responded directly to customers to deal with their individual customer service queries or specific question about our service.

We received a large number of questions in advance of the session (212 questions) and given many were multiple questions on one topic area, we have grouped these into one response. Where a similar question was asked and answered in the session itself, we have referred to this response in the written summary.

### HEALTHIER

#### **Q. Do United Utilities fluoridate the water, what chemicals are used & will it cause damage to my health?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q7](#).

#### **Q. Why and when did you stop fluoridating the water from the new treatment works (Williamsgate)?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q7](#).

#### **Q. Are you considering other possible water provisions rather than relying on rainwater? e.g. desalination**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q5](#).

#### **Q. Water Quality - how do you test it and how will it be improved?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q3](#).

#### **Q. What is the advantage of a smart meter? How are they read, installed and are they compulsory? Are they free?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q14](#) and [Q15](#).

#### **Q. Are you doing enough to reduce leakage?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q12](#) and [Q13](#). For further information regarding leakage reduction, please see our [Water Resources Management Plan](#) (page 64 onwards).

#### **Q. What are you doing to help customers reduce private leaks?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q13](#).

#### **Q. What are you doing to ensure you have enough water to meet increasing population and what are your future plans for reservoirs?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q27](#).

**Q. Much water is lost because poor families in particular cannot afford plumbers to fix leaks. Could United Utilities consider employing plumbers to work in deprived areas to deal with leaks and other water loss issues for free?**

In 2025-2030, we have proposed to deliver c.75,000 household water efficiency visits where we will find and fix leaks as well as install water saving devices including flow regulators for sustained savings. Customer affordability and vulnerability assessment will form a fundamental part of the selection process alongside other consideration such as leak visibility and high consumption.

**Q. Water is essential for life. Most people take it for granted. Would it be possible to conduct a high-profile campaign, involving celebs, sports stars etc to inform people that this is a precious resource not to be wasted?**

In on-going research with customers, we know that communicating to them about their water and wastewater services and saving water is important to them. We use different channels to try to reach people and always assess which medium offers best value for money, depending on the purpose of the information. In the past (Jan to March 2023) and as referred to in [Q30](#), we have run TV ads that speak to the quality and value of water. There are currently no plans to include celebs/sports stars, as the fees can be high, however, that's not to say that's something that won't be considered in the future.

In parallel to media based interventions, we run a schools education programme engaging with over 15,000 school children and as part of our on-going water efficiency programme we've carried out over 8,000 home visits, installing water savings devices and encouraging over 200,000 customers to sign-up to our [get water fit programme](#).

At the time of writing, we are running idents as part of the ITV Weather sponsorship – these raise awareness of how checking for leaks can save water, how shorter showers can save you money and energy as well as our Stop the Block campaign which is run across a variety of online and offline channels. Finally, due to the recent cold weather, we have sent winter readiness advice to all customers and priority services customers who have opted into email, as well as sharing winter ready messages across radio and social. Over the past 3 years we have seen awareness of these messages increase to over 75% - or three out of four - of all adults living in the North West, demonstrating the messages are getting out there.

**Q. What are you doing to invest in Lake Windermere?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q11](#).

**Q. Why is there too much black sludge coming out of the taps**

Slime (black jelly like substance), and staining (various colours from pink, red to black) are caused by organisms that breed in damp, warm environments in your home. Generally, the occurrence of conditions found in bathrooms and kitchens isn't an indication of a problem with the water supply. For more information visit:

<https://www.unitedutilities.com/help-and-support/your-water-supply/your-water/about-your-water/>

**Q. We moved to the Lowton area from Worsley, where the water was excellent. In Lowton, the amount of scum in the kettles and my steam iron is awful. Why if we are paying the same amounts are we subject to poorer quality water?**

From April 2023, the area around Lowton and Golborne moved from a soft water source to hard water source. The water supply is blended with water from other drinking water in your area sourced from underground (known as aquifers). Water from aquifers tend to have a higher mineral content as it has passed through layers of rock, before being pumped to the surface, treated, and then distributed into the pipe network. We have a vast integrated water network and from time to time we do move water around to help manage water resources to balance the needs of customers and the environment. During periods of high-water demand, it was noticeable the pressure in the network in parts of Leigh was dropping, and to improve the pressure and manage the resilience in the network we brought water from an adjacent area, which has historically been reliant on ground water sources.

With an increasing population, and more homes being built, we have created a network which enables us to transport water from various sources across the water system. During periods of high demand, our integrated



network gives us the capacity to use different sources of water to supply a particular area, which can mean a change to the hardness of the water. Customers can carry on using the water as normal. It will continue to be clean and safe, meeting strict standards set by the Drinking Water Inspectorate - it may just be a little different from what you're used to.

**Q. Why does Cheshire East water taste so bad? My wife and I have lived in various parts of England over the past 50 years and only in Knutsford, Cheshire East have we found the water undrinkable, we have had to resort to buying bottled water for the past 10 years plus.**

We are sorry that you dislike the taste of the water supplied to Knutsford. All water supplies vary slightly in their composition due to the naturally occurring minerals and other compounds in the source water. Water in different parts of the country will have a slightly different taste but all will meet the required water quality standards. More information is available on our website at: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/help-and-support/your-water-supply/your-water/water-quality/>

**Q. What type of health issues can be related to water quality?**

The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations set out the standards for a whole range of parameters in drinking water. When setting the standards, the relevant authorities take into consideration lifetime exposure to a particular parameter through drinking water to ensure that drinking water does not pose a risk to health. Water Quality is of a high standard in the North West with over 99.96% of tests meeting the regulatory requirements. Where we identify a sample that fails a particular standard, we carry out a full investigation, identify the root cause and undertake remedial work to prevent a recurrence, or work with customers to help them resolve the issue if it is associated with the condition of the internal plumbing within a property.

**Q. How often does the local public water system test my drinking water?**

Please see the Drinking Water Inspectorate report [DWI report](#) for more details on regulations and drinking water testing.

**Q. As regards to health: why are you not committed to changing ALL lead piping?**

We have mobilised a dedicated team to target and offer a grant for the removal of lead pipe. Between 2020 and 2025, we'll remove around 15,000 across the North West and we've got ambitious plans to double that going into 2025-2030.

**Q. I would like to know if you extract water from sewage water. Is this water then tested and returned to the drinking pool? If it is returned to the drinking pool what tests do you undertake to declare the processed water is deemed safe to return to the drinking water pool?**

We do not use wastewater effluent (sewage water) directly as a raw water source. In the North West, the majority of our raw water is abstracted from lakes or rivers with a small percentage abstracted from groundwater sources. In every case, we carry out a Drinking Water Safety Plan risk assessment, so we understand any potential risks to the quality of the raw water, and our water treatment works are designed to be able to treat the raw water that is abstracted. We monitor the quality of the raw water, the quality of water at various stages in the treatment process, the treated water leaving our water treatment works at storage points in the network and at customer properties. Customers can view the quality of the drinking water in their local area on our website at: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/help-and-support/your-water-supply/your-water/water-quality/> .

**Q. We are in Grappenhall - Warrington and until the last few years our water came from the lake in Wales which was excellent. Then we were told we would get a blend of this water and ground water from the Lymm area, supposedly blended so we wouldn't notice much difference. However, at various time we get a strong mix of the ground water and lots of scale and a strong chlorine taste to the water which you consider is within acceptable limits but to be frank it tastes grim and creates a scum on our tea which is at times worse than London water. I wonder if this is after you have diverted water because of major bursts, and this has affected the blend. My**

**question I suppose is will you be relying more on this groundwater source which in my opinion would not be a good move for us.**

Grappenhall can receive water supplies from Lake Vyrnwy or from local borehole sources. The predominant supply to the area is from Lake Vyrnwy but at times this may be supplemented with water from the local boreholes during periods of increased demand for example during dry weather, or for operational reasons, for example when we are undertaking maintenance on the local network or at our water treatment works. The local boreholes do have a higher mineral content than the softer waters taken from Lake Vyrnwy, which may impart a different taste to the water which can be noticeable in tea. We are carrying out a significant programme of work at one of our water treatment works which has reduced the amount of water available from our Lake Vyrnwy supply, and therefore we are currently more reliant on the local sources. The proportion coming from the local sources will vary depending on the demand and the volume of water available from the Lake Vyrnwy supply.

**Q. Will anything be done in Ainsdale to increase the current water pressure?**

All areas in Ainsdale operate above our standards of service (equivalent to 15m head pressure or, in simple terms, the water pressure should be powerful enough to fill a 4.5 litre (1 gallon) container in 30 seconds) and have seen no regular failures. If you feel you have a specific problem in your property, please log this on the United Utilities website at: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/emergencies/got-a-problem/low-water-pressure/>

**Q. Our supplier of water is Water Plus. Are they part of United Utilities? We are having problems with water pressure when wanting to water our bowling green through dry spells. Please could you give us advise on this?**

Water Plus is a water retailer that provides billing, meter reading, account management, water efficiency and other services for businesses and organisations across England and Scotland. The company is a joint venture between Severn Trent Water and United Utilities. More details can be found on the open water website [here](#).

When it comes to water pressure issues, in the first instance you should contact us – more information about what to do if you experience low pressure can be found on our website [here](#). If it isn't an issue with our network, some retailers offer value added services to their customers and can help them in understanding if they need a site resolution (such as water storage). You may need some on site water storage, which you can discuss with your retailer.

**Q. Why is my meter not read regularly by United Utilities?**

We try to read your water meter every six months, but the date depends on when we are next reading meters in your area. In some properties we have meters that we can read remotely and so those customers may have their meters read every three months. All the new meters we fit now allow us to take readings remotely, which means we won't need to visit in order to take a reading. If you would like access to these readings, then please let us know. You can find more information on our website: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/my-account/all-about-water-meters/i-have-a-water-meter/>

**Q. Why can't all households have water meters and not be given the choice in older properties. Leaks can be seen quicker.**

We encourage customers to consider fitting a water meter and, where it is possible, we will do so. However, there are occasions when it may not be possible to fit a water meter in a home. The reasons for this could be if the water supply is shared with other properties, there is more than one supply of water to the property, or the pipework is not suitable and there isn't room to install the meter or if extensive plumbing work is required. If that happens, we review the customer's account to see if paying the bill based on an assessed charge is a cheaper option (an assessed charge is a fixed annual charge based on property type). If this is the case, we will arrange for the tariff to be updated. More details can be found on our website at: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/my-account/all-about-water-meters/>

**Q. How are you ensuring customers who don't benefit from smart meters are still supported?**

Our plan proposes our largest ever package of financial support for our customers. The £525 million of affordability support will enable us to help one in 6 households with payment of their water bill. We're planning to extend the range and reach of the support we offer by introducing new schemes and tariffs designed specifically to support low-income customers. We'll be working closely with third party organisations and directly within local communities to raise awareness and improve accessibility of the help available. Further information can be found in our Affordability chapter on our [website](#). In addition, those customers who are not on smart meters will still have engagement regarding consumption insight to our regular meters, plus ways to save even if you are not metered at all i.e. raising awareness regarding link with water and energy (reducing water use can reduce energy too).

**Q. By using smart meters, has there been any consideration to incentivising customers to use less water i.e. not just a general reduction in bill through less charge but on top of that?**

We are considering trialling a number of incentive schemes to reduce water consumption with pilots likely commencing in 2023/2024.

**Q. What happens to tenants who are renting that cannot have permission to change or get smart meters, what can they do?**

Section 209A of the Water Industry Act 1999 gives tenants the right to apply for a meter, providing the tenancy agreement is a periodic tenancy or is a fixed term tenancy for six months or longer. Therefore, if the tenancy agreement is for 6 months or longer the tenants don't need the landlord's permission to have a meter fitted. This also means they don't need the landlord's permission if after completing a fixed term tenancy (usually 6 or 12 months) they have a tenancy agreement that rolls from week to week or month to month (sometimes called a periodic tenancy agreement).

Tenants can apply at any time during the tenancy of the property under these criteria, however they should let the landlord know they are applying. If the tenancy agreement is for a fixed term of less than 6 months, they will need the landlord's permission to have a meter fitted. United Utilities don't need permission from the landlord personally, we just need to know the date from the customer that the landlord gave their permission. For more information see <https://www.unitedutilities.com/my-account/all-about-water-meters/apply-for-a-water-meter/information-about-meters/>

**Q. You have a huge budget for the next 5 years and I believe you have pledged to reduce leaks by 25% by 2030, what percentage of this budget is going towards helping customers to reduce their own in-home leakage?**

Around a third of the total expenditure on leakage, metering and water efficiency will help customers reduce leaks and consumption in their own homes and other properties. As part of our water visit programme (delivering c75,000 water visits) we will assess opportunities to offer joint water and energy visits maximising water and energy savings for metered customers and allowing unmetered customers the ability to save on their energy whilst educating them around using less water.

**Q. We have had a number of leaks on our road, where all the houses date back to the early 1900s. Each time United Utilities come and repair the leaks, but often not until lasting damage has been done to the surface of the road. Why do United Utilities not simply replace the whole length of pipes once and for all, which would surely be more cost effective for them, less inconvenient for us, and reduce the amount of damage to the road surfaces overall, the last of which brings increased costs in terms of resurfacing and repairing potholes caused by the heavy machinery brought onto site?**

Over recent years we have prioritised finding and fixing leaks and whilst doing so have further developed our learning on how leaks occur. Our water pipes are pressurised, and when a pipe is repaired to fix a leak, the risk is that a leak may then occur at the next weakest part of the water pipe.

The challenge is that we have over 40,000 km of pipes, which means inevitably we will have issues from time to time. Our learning has informed our proposed plan for 2025 to 2030 in transitioning and adjusting our strategy to renewing sections of mains to help address this problem.

**Q. Will there be guarantees that leaks repaired more efficiently?**

Our proposed plan to address leaks in the next Asset Management Period (2025 to 2030) is to transition to a strategy of mains renewal. Renewing lengths of pipes will be more cost effective in avoiding costs of repairing consequential leaks and overall, less disruptive for customers.

**Q. What do water leaks and water main breaks cost our water system each year?**

Detecting and repairing leaks efficiently is a core part of our business. We have over 70 teams operating across the region fixing leaks and in a typical year this could cost around £50 million. As part of the challenge in our plan for 2025-2030, we intend to significantly increase the number of poor condition mains that we replace. We intend to trial replacing longer sections of pipe as part of our repair process, when we believe that the pipe is at risk of failing again in the near future.

Overall, we believe that this will enable us to reduce disruption and improve our leakage performance. We have challenging targets from our regulator that will ensure that we repair our network efficiently whenever it breaks, as the longer a leak runs the harder it is for us to meet our targets. Our teams work hard to complete the repairs as quickly, safely, and effectively as possible to minimise potential damage. Where damage occurs, United Utilities are responsible for resolving the issues however there maybe circumstances where 3<sup>rd</sup> parties are responsible and so costs would be recovered from them.

**Q. Who pays for all the damages when a water main breaks?**

Our teams work hard to complete the repairs as quickly, safely, and effectively as possible to minimise potential damage. Where damage occurs, United Utilities are responsible for resolving the issues. However, there may be circumstances where 3<sup>rd</sup> parties are responsible and so costs would be recovered from them.

**Q. Are you planning to increase the amount of reservoir capacity either new or enhance existing ones in anticipation of higher demand for rate of water usage. I expect the answer will include some reference to the better use of existing supplies. However, irrespective of that should planning not be made for future so that the water supply is secure, and shortage does not come as a surprise and avoid rationing? What future plans are there for reservoirs to satisfy the requirements and safeguarding decades to come?**

With increasing pressure on water resources across the UK, our Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) defines our strategy to achieve a long-term, best value and sustainable plan for water supplies in the North West. In terms of increasing supplies, this means plans for reservoirs, boreholes and water treatment works. At the same time, we look to reduce demand for these resources by reducing leakage in our network, reducing leakage in customers' properties and other water efficiency measures. We put all of our plans onto our website and more information can be found here: [WRMP website](#).

You can see how we're planning more generally for the future, taking into account changes such as population increases and climate change, in our [Long-Term Delivery Strategy](#) which is found on our website (see page 18 onwards).

**Q. I would like to ask what the long-term plan really is for the road on the west side of Thirlmere. It seems the decision has been made that it is cheaper to not bother reopening the access. Will you allow an independent assessment of the stability of Rough Crag? Your lack of action creates a far greater risk to walkers and cyclists as they have to negotiate the road on the eastern side. Why has the Thirlmere Road been shut without any public consultation? What justification has been given for this? If it is deemed a risk to the public, where can we obtain a copy of the relevant risk assessment?**

Independent engineering specialists identified high risk of rock and tree falls, so a specialist engineering assessing has identified what needs to be done to make the area safe. We are working with relevant authorities and Natural England to approve work due to the protected nature of the landscape or an alternative solution - new lakeshore path for walkers, cyclists, and wheelchair users and horse riders. We are committed to a solution so that everyone can enjoy the West Road.

## **STRONGER**

### **Q. Why are drains not unblocked on a regular basis and what are you doing about it?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q21](#).

### **Q. Why reduce spills by 60% and not 100%**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q19](#).

### **Q. What is the plan to stop storm sewage overflows & cost?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q8](#). For more information specifically on river health, we'd like to direct you to our [Better Rivers Report for 2022/23](#).

### **Q. How much money is needed to stop sewerage being released into sea and rivers?**

Our plans to reduce the impact of storm overflows are set within the framework of the Government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan. This places the following requirements on water companies:

- By 2035, water companies will have: improved all storm overflows discharging near every designated bathing water; and improved 75% of storm overflows discharging into or near 'high priority sites'.
- By 2045, water companies will have improved all remaining storm overflows discharging into or near 'high priority sites'.
- By 2050, no storm overflows will be permitted to operate outside of unusually heavy rainfall or to cause any adverse ecological harm.

Our target is that by 2050 an overflow will operate no more than 10 times per year. According to estimates prepared for the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra), the cost to deliver this in the North West will be around £19 billion.

### **Q. When will live monitoring of CSO discharges be available & how will it work?**

We will monitor 100% of our storm overflows by end of 2023 – we are currently at over 99%. There is a requirement in the Government's storm overflow plan to share real time monitoring data by 1st April 2025. We are planning to publish our data significantly ahead of this deadline where it will be available on our website – the information we will provide will include the location of the overflow and the time at which the overflow began operating, published within an hour of the start of the spill.

We already publish Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) data each year [on our website](#). This records spill numbers such as the duration of a spill.

More information is available in on our website at:

<https://www.unitedutilities.com/corporate/responsibility/environment/reducing-pollution/storm-overflows/>

**Q. I live in a street of homes built in 2015, so only 8 years ago. Whenever it rains heavily, my neighbours and I suffer from gurgling toilets and rising water levels in the toilet bowls. Obviously, we are all concerned we may suffer from flooding. To the layman it appears the drainage in the street is inadequate for the houses that have been built. The housebuilder was Redrow. Whose responsibility is it to fix this problem?**

The foul sewers on your street (the ones that take toilet, bath, shower and sink water) are the responsibility of residents to maintain until the point at which they connect to the public sewer which is located near the entrance to Hurst Green. If you experience issues with your wastewater services, please call 0345 672 3723 and we will be able to investigate the public sewer to ensure it is performing correctly.

**Q. Should all households be informed as to the differences in the drains in their homes, i.e. foul and surface waters and to what can be disposed of in each or not at all. In a recent conversation with the council, I proposed they gave a leaflet to all their clients as I have seen people pouring all types of noxious substances down the street surface water drains. Could every house that has tarmacked over their gardens, for cars, be advised to put in drainage or a soakaway in to prevent the surface water over topping the drains thus causing the sewage discharges that people are complaining about?**

When a property is purchased, the drainage plans are shared as part of the search requests for the property. This identifies whether a property is served by a separate system; foul and surface water, or a combined system which takes both surface water and foul drainage away in one pipe. We've got some great information on our website about informing people on misconnections which can be found here: [Making the right connection | United Utilities](#).

We work jointly with the Environment Agency to combat the issue of misconnected household drains. Once a contaminated watercourse has been discovered, where the waste or foul water is going where it shouldn't, the pollution can be traced back to the property where the waste pipes are misconnected. The owner of the property is responsible for making sure the misconnection is put right.

General permitted development rules state that the paving over of any front garden's permeable area with an impermeable surface requires planning permission if over 5 meters squared. We're actively involved in a joint project with the North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee over the next two years to review the effectiveness of the current legislation and work to provide recommendations on how we can make more sustainably draining features standardised. For more information on current legislation, please see [Permeable surfacing of front gardens: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

There is also a helpful blog on the Flood Hub, a North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee funded website that covers information for people in the North West. This can be found at: [Blog: Driveways, Raingardens and Soakaways | The Flood Hub](#)

**Q. Is there a system available so one can link used washer or bath water to flush toilets? Could keeping up the pumping of water from ex-mines help with flooding and lowering water table.**

There are numerous systems that you can install that enable you to reuse grey water. One of the simplest ways is to fill a bucket and pour it directly down the toilet. This saves a flush and will get rid of whatever is in your toilet pan quickly and effectively.

We produce a Water Resources Management Plan every 5 years and through this process we review all available options to improve water resources, no matter the cost, complexity or innovation required. Mine sources are considered in this process but due to contamination associated with old mining activities the cost of treatment and pumping of water is considerable compared to our other available options. Also, there can be issues related to the structural integrity of mines, as well as local ecological impacts. Please note that the British Geological Survey together with the Coal Authority are actively investigating the potential of mine waters for geothermal energy. See following links for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mine-water-heat>; <https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/coalauthority/home.html>

**Q. Are you planting trees to reduce flooding? Are you working with tree planting charities?**

United Utilities has committed to plant a million trees by 2030. This is primarily to remove carbon from the atmosphere, but some trees are planted to help reduce flooding. We work with several charities on tree planting

schemes such as the City of Trees and Mersey Forest. For further detail on our proposal to continue working in partnership, including with nationally important organisations such as the RSPB, please see the [United Utilities partnerships working webpage](#).

**Q. Developer contributions towards upgrading the ancient sewer network - you will be aware of the extensive housing developments taking place in the Crosby, Thornton, Formby and Maghull areas and the pressures this will put on the ancient sewer system. I note you cannot legally prevent developers tapping into the existing sewer system, but this must surely be getting over-capacity. Can you not secure contributions from developers to ensure the local sewers are upgraded to accommodate their effluent discharges?**

When a developer connects to our network, they pay an infrastructure charge for both water and sewerage. The infrastructure charge payments we receive go into a ring-fenced pot which is used to invest in upgrades to the sewer system as a result of development occurring. As such, we are not able to also request payments via the planning system for upgrades to our water and wastewater networks as a result of the impact of development.

To incentivise foul only discharges to the public sewer system from new development, we offer a discount of 90% on the infrastructure charge for development which is a foul only connection. This reflects the fact that surface water flows are much larger than foul flows and therefore have the biggest impact on our sewer network.

Notwithstanding the above points, it is critical that our local authority partners do all they can during the development approval process to ensure that only foul water connects to the public sewer system and to ensure that sustainable drainage systems are incorporated in new development proposals when required by policy.

**Q. Raw sewage discharges from Lancaster Road main sewer into Gilda Brook on Duncan Matheson Playing Fields; this, to my knowledge, was first reported in 2015, after storm Desmond and maybe before that. Salford Council have been trying since early 2016 to get this situation rectified; why has it taken 8 years and still no action? The discharge pollutes the waters within a sport playing field area and could be a health hazard to people using these facilities; never mind the detrimental effect it is having on the environment and ecosystem.**

**Q. There is a CSO in my garden, from a culverted section of Gilda Brook that discharges into the open main river portion of Gilda Brook. The culverted portion has two Storm surge tanks, a) from the Lancaster Road sewer, a pumped tank and b) from the Victoria Road sewer, a filtered non-pumped tank. Since the middle of this year, after heavy rain fall, the CSO outflow within my garden has shown pollution in the form of FOAM: After a while the foam disappears only to reappear after the next heavy rain fall, this to date is ongoing. This suggests to me that there is an upstream pollution problem either from the surge tanks or the culvert itself. United Utilities appear to be failing to maintain this sewage system, please can this be rectified.**

There is a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) on Lancaster Road which has an environmental permit to discharge into Gilda Brook. Overflows exist to ensure that when sewers are full, as a result of excess rainwater, the combination of sewage and rain water discharges to a watercourse rather than into homes and gardens. One of the challenges in this area is that the brook within Duncan Matheson playing fields is blocked so water is unable to flow freely downstream. This results in storm discharge from the CSO and rainwater collecting in the playing fields.

This issue has been discussed with Salford City Council and has been escalated to the Environment Agency by United Utilities and Salford City Council. In the meantime, our River Rangers, a new team established earlier this year to protect and preserve the environment around rivers, are patrolling this area once a month, removing any sewerage litter they find.

The foam is caused by detergents in the CSO discharge being stirred up during a spill. We have checked the monitors on the CSOs in this area and all of the spills that have happened have complied with the environmental permits. There haven't been any reports of pollution incidents in the area.

**Q. Some years ago, there was a huge development designed to stop flooding in Strand Road and Watery Lane. I assume it works as designed because there has been very little flooding since then. What concerns me is the effluent I regularly see coming up the Ribble with the tide. First the ugly sludge is brought up the middle of the river and then as the tide goes out, that sludge is deposited on each bank. I have no way of knowing the composition of this effluent, but it does look suspiciously like human effluent. If it is possible to ask the question on my behalf, could you please discover what this sludge is and how the ugly problem might be mitigated?**

We know that the River Ribble and the estuary does suffer from a variety of sources of pollution (agricultural, industry, animal, road run off and sewage from overflows) and other natural organic compounds that can create what looks like sea foam within the watercourse.

With regards to United Utilities playing our part and helping to improve the water quality in the River Ribble, we have identified 15 schemes that will be completed before the end of 2030. These schemes are part of our Better Rivers programme and are designed to specifically reduce spills from storm overflows. More information on the progress we are making to improve river health can be found in our [Better Rivers Report for 2022/23](#).

**Q. How many times has sewage been discharged into our rivers or sea?**

We have a large investment plan to reduce our impact on rivers and to work with others to protect the local environment and improve water quality, as set out in the presentation.

More information on the frequency and duration of every storm overflow operation in the North West from a United Utilities asset can be found on our website [here](#).

## **GREENER**

**Q. When will you holding an open forum/chat/ meeting regarding all the existing North West Water/United Utilities, shooting Licences/Leases held by shoots in the Lancashire area that you are proposing to terminate. Why don't you come along one day Louise and see for yourself what it's all about. I have some spare wellies you can borrow and a good waterproof coat for you. See how many people's lives are dependent on your North West Water Leases, Leases that have been in existence well before North West Water/United Utilities existed. Just come and spend a day with us and see for yourself what a fantastic day out it is, managing your grounds. Get from behind that desk and feel the fresh air in your face.**

As part of a review into how we manage our catchment land to ensure we meet our water quality and quantity objectives, we shared details on our plans to not renew around 20 licenses for game bird shooting as they came to their end. Since then, we have received many representations on behalf of local rural communities about the potential social and economic impact this decision might have. As a result, we are arranging an independent review of each of the shooting licences. This will take on board all points of view including social, economic, and environmental considerations. We will encourage any interested parties to share their views and evidence with the independent reviewer once appointed. We do not plan to make any changes to current arrangements until the review is complete.

**Q. I live in Glossop, Derbyshire and the local reservoirs are under Severn Trent, even though I pay my water bill to United Utilities. I wrote to you in July 2022 and was told it's not your responsibility? WHY NOT? Surely you have an overall view of the water systems in the country. The reservoirs over the summer have been virtually empty and the reservoirs are absolutely FULL to the brim with Silt. Severn Trent fobbed me off with the fact that it is dangerous to attempt to clear them out, plus it would cost a fortune in landfill to dispose of the silt. I despaired!! If the silt was removed from the edges, it would not need to be dangerous, plus the silt can be sold to garden centres as its rich in nutriments which are good for the garden and eco-friendly. I am sure there are other options and ways to dispose of the silt that could be discussed. Is there any way United Utilises can help to clear the reservoirs out? Our Whaley Bridge Dam nearly burst its banks, as I feel they are neglected. If the reservoirs were cleared out, they would hold more water, that's got to be a good thing.**



As the reservoirs you refer to are owned and operated by other organisations, we are unable to work on them. As we do not own these reservoirs, we do not have any expenditure allocated to spend on – or any rights to perform work on reservoirs owned by Severn Trent or the Whaley Bridge Dam, which is owned and operated by the Canal & River Trust.

**Q. I live in Manchester and see new housing, apartment blocks and business developments regular. As fresh water is finite, and sources of retaining is key. How does this effect the performance of United Utilities adapting to the increase population water usages?**

With increasing pressure on water resources across the UK, our Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) defines our strategy to achieve a long-term, best value and sustainable plan for water supplies in the North West. We put all of our plans onto our [WRMP website](#) including a customer friendly version. You can view our proposed business plan in full and access the supporting evidence used in constructing the plan on our website as well at [PR24 business plan](#). You can also see how we're planning for the future, considering population increases and climate change in the [Long Term Delivery Strategy \(UUW12\)](#).

**Q. What plans have you for building new water treatment plants for an ever-increasing number of dwellings in your area of responsibility?**

Our Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) defines our strategy to achieve a long-term, best value and sustainable plan for water supplies in the North West. It ensures that we have an adequate supply to meet demand over the 25 years from 2020 to 2045. More information about our analysis and plans can be found in the WRMP on our website [here](#). Section 4.3.5 on page 13 is particularly helpful in this regard. You can also see how we're planning for the future, considering population increases and climate change in the [Long Term Delivery Strategy \(UUW12\)](#), in particular on page 19, section 2.3.17.

**Q. A major irritation locally is the subway adjacent to Blundellsands & Crosby station, which is prone to regular flooding, especially when there is a high tide. The subway is adopted by the local council, but the sewers below are the responsibility of United Utilities. What plans do you have to inspect and repair this item, which is an environmental and health & safety issue?**

We have no assets under the subway Blundellsands & Crosby Station and therefore you would need to ask your local council as it would be their responsibility to drain under the subway. We work closely with the local authorities, but if it is a United Utilities issue, please contact us.

**Q. Considering the population increase for the region and clearly revenue obtained from users. Do this increase of demand offset future reduction in bills.**

We need to ensure that we can meet the water and wastewater needs of a growing population by investing in, maintaining, and improving the capacity of our assets, ensuring the pipes and networks supply sufficient and wholesome water and dispose of wastewater safely. We will invest efficiently when building these new pipes and assets, but overall, there will be an increase in costs to meet the needs of the growing population, which will be met through future customer bills.

**Q. Subsiding sewers and their effect on the highway network: I am a resident of Blundellsands and am alarmed about the undulating condition of the highway network due to settlement of sewer pipes and sinkholes in the area. Sefton Council's solution tends to be to throw tarmac into the depression but not treat the underlying issues. Why are United Utilities not taking a more pro-active role in working closely with the Council to adopt a more durable solution to the problem of subsiding sewers?**

We respond to reports of issues to our assets and complete the necessary repairs. We are unable to comment on the actions of the local council and their spot repairs to the highway. We try and work closely with the council, however if you have any issues regarding United Utilities, please contact us.

**Q. Why all water companies are not using the resource they are dealing with, i.e. water, to generate income and create profit for their UK customers. Water is capable of generating huge resources of energy and electricity as it moves about, can you not harness that to generate power for pumping at processing plants, lighting heating at sites, for putting power back into the grid and generating income. Fully utilising this will bring down customers' bills rather than increasing them, I'm sure if properly utilised we wouldn't have to pay bills and companies would still generate a profit to pay their shareholder.**

We are looking at how we can make the best use of our land to increase our renewable energy generation capacity. Since October 2021, all the electricity we use is renewable, either through our own renewable generation assets or through the purchase of renewable electricity. We are focused on improving our energy resilience and self-generation capacity, with a target of achieving 50 per cent self-sufficiency by 2030. Hydropower forms part of the renewable energy we generate. Although there are some opportunities to capture the energy available from water in our system, much of the water is pumped and our pumping systems are designed so that there is as little wasted energy as possible. Where generation is possible and economically feasible, we do install hydropower turbines, for example our most recent install was a 127kw hydro turbine at our newest water treatment works at Williamsgate, Cumbria. This captures energy available from the gravity transfer of raw water from Thirlmere Reservoir prior to treatment and provides around half of what is needed to run the plant.

For more information on the energy we generate, please see the section on this in our integrated annual report (from page 91): <https://unitedutilities.annualreport2023.com/media/2monspzj/31404-united-utilities-ar-2023-fully-linked-singles.pdf>

## **BETTER**

**Q. How do I get financial support and what does this look like?**

If you'd like to find out more about what support is available to help you pay your bill, please call us on 0800 072 6765 or visit our [webpage](#) which provides a lot of information about the schemes we have available to help you.

**Q. How much will my bill increase and what is it being spent on?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q17](#) and [Q18](#). The average annual bill today is £417, and this will increase to £556 by 2030 (these figures are before inflation). This means the average cost for water and wastewater services will be around £1.52 per day by 2030.

Bill increases are linked to new requirements and services and some of the improvements that we'll make will be:

- Sevenfold increase in value of environmental programme
- 2 million people's water suppliers safeguarded
- Halving the chance of a hosepipe ban
- Improved water quality of 1.4 million customers
- 60% spill reduction, with £3.1bn investment
- Protecting and enhancing 500km of rivers across the region
- 30,000 jobs, including 7,000 new roles
- £525 million affordability support

For more information, please see our [business plan presentation](#).

**Q. Who is paying for it and why?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q17](#) and [Q18](#). For more information, please see our [business plan presentation](#).

**Q. How much money have you invested since privatisation & what have you done?**

In the 30 years since privatisation, we have invested around £22.6 billion to deliver customer service and environmental improvements. Included in our business plan submission is a document called "Assurance and Track Record" which provides evidence of our track record in delivering on our promises in the current five-year

investment period. More information can be found in section 10.4 onwards in the following document on our website: [https://pr24.unitedutilities.com/pdfs/UUW10\\_chapter\\_10.pdf](https://pr24.unitedutilities.com/pdfs/UUW10_chapter_10.pdf)

**Q. Why should Management/Shareholders get rewarded when investment is needed?**

This question was also asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at [Q34](#)

**Q. What is Louise Beardmore's salary? Does Louise also get a bonus? And if so, how much was it last year? Are our water bills expected to rise to deal with the sewage in the water supply and if so, how much will this increase generate for UNITED UTILITIES in total per year?**

Executive pay is linked to meeting customer service, operational and environmental targets, individual performance, and financial performance. It is set by an independent Board committee, taking into account the need to deliver for all stakeholders, including customers and the environment as well as investors. Executive directors informed the Board committee of their intention to voluntarily waive around 21% of their incentive outcomes in respect of 2022/23, in recognition of their personal commitment to a reset across the water sector in relation to environmental performance. This affected the Better Rivers component of the annual bonus and five of the measures in the customer basket component of the Long Term Plan, reducing their performance-related pay outcomes by around 21 per cent. Furthermore, the performance-related pay outcomes that the executive directors received last year were not be paid for by customers.

Going forward, we are committed to making sure that at least 30 per cent of performance-related pay outcomes are related to environmental performance, including reducing storm overflow activations to improve river health.

In our Annual Report, there is a section dedicated to executive and board remuneration which provides a full disclosure about our approach. More information can be found from page 170 onwards at: [United Utilities 2023 Annual Report - Governance section](#)

The question about bill increases was asked and answered in the session itself and can be found at Q17 and Q18. The average annual bill today is £417, and this will increase to £556 by 2030 (these figures are before inflation). This means the average cost for water and wastewater services will be around £1.52 per day by 2030. Details on what improvements will be delivered is listed above under the second question in the 'Better Section' – "how much will my bill increase and what is it being spent on?"

**Q. In the plan it is stated that in the North West, 28% claim disability benefits - figure from House of Commons library July 2022 the current figure from the House of Commons library UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk) shows the worst area in the North West is 16.3% claiming disability benefit. Much less than 28%. Have the figures changes markedly since 2022 or are there different definitions? Discrepancies cast doubt on any other figures.**

Thank you for your observation, the statistic should read as '24% of people have a disability' which is referenced in the House of Commons Library UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences published in July 2022. We made an error on the PR24 website and we have now changed the number to 24% - see: <https://pr24.unitedutilities.com/>

**Q. How much do you spend on helping people save water? Helping reduce their bills and cut carbon emissions.**

Around a third of the total expenditure on leakage, metering and water efficiency will help customers reduce leaks and consumption in their own homes and other properties. As part of our water visit programme (delivering c75,000 water visits) we will assess opportunities to offer joint water and energy visits maximising water and energy savings for metered customers and allowing unmetered customers the ability to save on their energy whilst educating them around using less water.

**Q. Over the last few years my neighbours and myself have had our water turned off. Do you have a policy for getting bottled water for residents who have health problems?**

Yes, we provide bottled water for priority services customers in instances where their supply is impacted. You can find more information on our website at: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/help-and-support/priority-services/>.

**Q. Could water bills be reduced by 25%, for single occupancy in the same manner as local authority bills?**

We do have charges that relate specifically to single occupiers:

- any customer charged via a water meter is charged based on the volume of water that they use so no reduction would be needed in these instances
- if a customer is unable to have a water meter fitted (usually because of the pipework arrangements at their home), we have a specific assessed charge for single occupiers

Our single occupier assessed charge is based on the average metered usage for single occupiers across our region. Any customers who are charged based on the historic rateable value of their home can apply to us to have a water meter fitted free of charge and we will then charge them as above. We are also currently exploring the option to introduce a single occupier charge specifically for customers who are eligible to collect their state pension.

**Q. Why are staff still working from home?**

The majority of our colleagues carry out their roles at our regional treatment works; as mobile field workers or they are based at our head office in Lingley Mere, Warrington and some colleagues work at our office in Whitehaven. About a third of the workforce perform roles which allow them to have some flexibility to work from home or the office. This hybrid flexible working approach was developed post COVID, with those colleagues working on average 3 days a week in the office.

**Q. In what way are you going to support 30,000 quality skilled jobs?**

Between 2020 and 2025 we are investing £5.9bn in running and upgrading the North West's water infrastructure and services. We employ over 5,000 people directly, but we support another 17,500 jobs through our supply chain. Our proposed business plan would see us spend £13.7bn over the 2025-2030 period and support a total of 30,000 jobs, 7,000 of which would be new.

**Q. United Utilities is one of the biggest landowners in the NW. What investment does the company propose to make directed at improvements in the quality of, and access to, the natural environment of its estate? I'd particularly like to know what measures are proposed to: manage flow in water courses to create wetland habitat while mitigating flooding and seasonal water shortages, protect and improve carbon storage by wetland and peatland, promote increased biodiversity across the estate enable the human population to benefit from interaction with the natural environment in all its forms. Does the investment plan include clear-sighted proposals on partnership working with expert organisations such as the RSPB and the Woodland Trust to ensure money is spent to best effect and not just to "tick a box"?**

We own and manage 56,000 hectares of land in the North West, primarily as catchment land to supply high quality drinking water. This covers some of the most vibrant and diverse natural environments in England. We strive to achieve a balance between encouraging public access and protecting water quality, wildlife, and habitats. Our catchment land is critical for delivering resilient water services. Our proposals for 2025-2030 aim to ensure water sufficiency, improve water quality, reduce flood and manage greenhouse gas emissions. As well as meeting our core obligations, land management delivers additional benefits for customers – access and recreation, biodiversity, and the potential to harness renewable energy.

Our proposed investment drives value across wide ranging social and environmental benefits, through a range of activities. You can read more about the social and environmental value created by our plan and about our environment strategy on our website. You can read about our environment strategy on our website. We actively

encourage people to enjoy our sites and we want them to do so safely. We are continuing to manage our sites for visitors, you can find out about the sites we manage and the main attractions for visitors on our website.

We have a long history of working in partnerships with a range of organisations in the North West, for example we have worked closely with the RSPB since the 1960's and recently became the first water company to form a strategic partnership with the Rivers Trust. Through 2025-2030 we're proposing to scale up our partnership working, this includes sustainable land management on our sites for the benefit of water quality, biodiversity and providing customers with access. Our plan includes a proposed £344m investment in partnership schemes, unlocking additional value through co-funding, in the water cycle and more widely. You can read about our plans with partners on our website as well as the benefits such partnerships have enabled historically.

For further detail on our proposal to continue working in partnership with important organisations such as the RSPB, please see the United Utilities [partnerships working webpage](#) and our proposed business plan chapters UUW06 – Delivering social and environmental value and UUW38 – Working in partnership.

**Q. How long has United Utilities been privatised? What risk do equity shareholders of United Utilities take or is a guaranteed "risk free" return on their investment? How much has been paid to date in dividends to shareholders since privatisation? How many times during the period of privatisation has United Utilities dumped soiled water into water courses e.g. lakes, rivers, and the sea? Who will have to pay for these improvements? Shareholders or bill payers? United Utilities are a monopoly supplier, there doesn't seem to be any market competition to keep consumer prices low, why can't I use another company to supply water? Why has it taken such a long time to realise that such huge investment is required? How much in bonuses has been paid to United Utilities executives etc? Is the salary of the United Utilities Board linked to financial performance e.g. share price?**

The water industry was privatised in 1990 and since then we have invested around 3 times as much as we have paid as dividends – investment in customer service and environmental improvements has been around £22.6bn with £7.3bn paid in dividends (or, on average £300m per year).

We need our shareholders and investors to provide the financing to deliver the investment programme we have set out. We rely on investors to help fund our investment programmes now. For this equity investment we pay a dividend to those shareholders in return for them making the investment possible. We are a long-term business, and we have a long-term and sustainable financing policy to attract and retain investors to enable us to invest in services for customers. You can read more about the approach we take to making decisions on dividends in our Annual Performance Report. For 2023, this is set out on pages 129 – 132 of our report, available here:

<https://www.unitedutilities.com/globalassets/documents/pdf/united-utilities-annual-performance-report-2022-23>

Debt finance and equity investors allow us to spend the money needed to deliver improvements right away, and then the cost of these improvements are reflected in customer bills, spread over a long period of time, across the lifetime of the asset. This means that we can deliver improvements now and spread the costs of doing so across all the generations of customers that will benefit from these investments. Regulated returns for investors are around 4% or so, which is roughly the same interest rate charged for mortgage repayments. This means that shareholders and debt investors provide the funding for new investments and then this is recovered from customer bills over an extended period of time.

Equity investors do take risk as part of their investment. Dividends are not guaranteed and are only paid to shareholders subject to several tests that are applied by the company to ensure the dividend is sustainable, including taking account of the need for the company to deliver for customers and the environment. Equity investment acts as a "buffer" to manage cost shocks that require immediate funding.

The split of debt and equity investment for the regulated water company, United Utilities Water, is close to OFWAT's assumed weightings for the notional water company. This means that there is an appropriate balance of debt – which can be cheaper to finance but is less flexible if there are cost shocks – and equity – which carries a premium but is more flexible than debt.

Water and wastewater services are generally provided by regional monopoly suppliers because this provides the most economically efficient means of providing the service. This is because the service relies substantially on a local network to treat and transport water and wastewater and investment is often long term and in physical infrastructure. This means that duplicative investments in multiple competing networks or treatment infrastructure would lead to increases, not decreases, in overall cost. Because we are a monopoly supplier, price and service are heavily regulated. OFWAT is the regulator that sets the five-year price and service package we must provide. It scrutinises the proposals we make to ensure they are efficient and requires evidence that the plans are sufficient to deliver the services and investment we are required to make to meet statutory/legal obligations. The scope and pace of investment is considered at least every five years through the business plan process. OFWAT is currently considering our proposals on the scope and pace of investment for the next five-year period to 2030.

We have a large investment plan to reduce our impact on rivers and to work with others to protect the local environment and improve water quality, as set out in the presentation. More information on the frequency and duration of every storm overflow operation in the North West from a United Utilities asset can be found on our website [here](#).

Executive pay is linked to meeting customer service, operational and environmental targets, individual performance, and financial performance. It is set by an independent Board committee, taking into account the need to deliver for all stakeholders, including customers and the environment as well as investors. Executive directors informed the Board committee of their intention to voluntarily waive around 21% of their incentive outcomes in respect of 2022/23, in recognition of their personal commitment to a reset across the water sector in relation to environmental performance. This affected the Better Rivers component of the annual bonus and five of the measures in the customer basket component of the Long Term Plan, reducing their performance-related pay outcomes by around 21 per cent. Furthermore, the performance-related pay outcomes that the executive directors received last year were not be paid for by customers.

Going forward, we are committed to making sure that at least 30 per cent of performance-related pay outcomes are related to environmental performance, including reducing storm overflow activations to improve river health.

In our Annual Report, there is a section dedicated to executive and board remuneration which provides a full disclosure about our approach. More information can be found from page 170 onwards at: [United Utilities 2023 Annual Report - Governance section](#)

**Q. How much has been invested by United Utilities in the last 25 since privatisation? In the most recent 10 years, United Utilities dividend pay-out has risen from an average of 72% [2014-2018] to 192% [2019-2023], reaching nearly 400% in 2021.**

Since privatisation, we have invested around £22.6 billion - 3 times as much as we have paid as dividends. When we look at performance, we see our underlying measures to be the most appropriate as it better reflects company performance. On this underlying view, dividend pay-out between FY14-18 was 81% versus 90% for FY19-23. In FY21 pay out was 77%.

**Q. How does United Utilities assess what they can invest against the finances they can raise? The Finance sections are particularly impenetrable, yet crucial to understanding the business plan. Please could we have an explanation of the assumptions and model which is used?**

We are a long-term business, and we have a long-term and sustainable financing policy to attract and retain investors to enable us to invest in services for customers.

In terms of how we finance the plan, and how that works, we don't start from a standpoint of how much money we must spend and where that can go. We start with the requirements. What do customers tell us is important to them? What do legislation and environmental requirements tell us is important? What does the Drinking Water Inspectorate want us to deliver in terms of the water quality?

We always start with the statutory requirements and the customer preferences, and we then consider what we can realistically deliver in a 5-year period. Only then do we start to look at how much that would cost.

When we think about how much it would cost, we must think about 2 things. We have to think about how much money we could raise from investors, or borrow, in order to fund that investment, and then we have to think about how that gets repaid and translate that into customer bills. The price review process is an ongoing process over many years. It's a consistent and continuous triangulation of all those things: What are the requirements? How much would it cost to invest? What would be the impact on bills?

Then we consider this several times to try and make it better. Often, the first answer that we get to meet customer preferences isn't the most efficient. So, then we consider if there might be a better way, which might cost less and have less environmental impact.

We work through that process over a number of years, and a lot of that is the consultations that we've been doing to run these plans through with customers - about 95,000 in total.

Where we are now is that OFWAT, and the regulators, are reviewing these proposals. They have to go through every one of those documents on the website, and a number of spreadsheets that sit alongside that, and they are going through and challenging us in terms of: Have we got the priorities right? Have we listened to customers? Have we got the costs right? At the end of that process, they will determine what they think is the right balance of that plan.

I'm sure they will have some challenges to put to us, and we will want to follow through with these. After this, we will then approach the capital markets to raise the financing.

We are confident that it is a financeable plan. We've thought very carefully about what goes into the plan, the pace of our ambition, what we can realistically deliver and what we can realistically raise from the market.

**Q. Why do you not reduce the dividends on shares in order to mitigate the increase in cost you intend to make to customers?**

Debt and equity shareholders allow us to spend the money needed to deliver improvements right away, and then spread the cost of those improvements over a long period of time, that's why we have to pay interest and dividends. This means that financing could be seen as similar to a mobile phone contract, or a mortgage, whereby you pay a little bit every month, or every year, in order to meet the cost of the asset, but you can enjoy that asset right away. The amount of dividends that we pay annually does vary, year to year, but it's around £300 million and around the same again in terms of interest payments.

That's on what we call a regulatory capital value, an investment to date of around £12 billion. That again is around that level of 4% or so, roughly the same interest that you would be paying on a mortgage at the moment, and that's the base levels of returns that our investors are receiving.

**Q. My question is, for each of the last 4 years, what are your Net Profits (one figure for each year) and what is your volume of Sewage discharges for each of those four years?**

Each year, we report the financial performance for United Utilities Water (the regulated water company) in our Annual Performance Report. These are made available on our website at:

<https://www.unitedutilities.com/corporate/about-us/performance/annual-performance-reports/>

Net profit for United Utilities Water Limited, which is the regulated company, in the last four years has been as follows (numbers are rounded):

2022/23: reported operating profit of £444m, reported profit after tax of £168m

2021/22: reported operating profit of £601m, reported loss after tax of £77m

2020/21: reported operating profit of £602m, reported profit after tax of £410m

2019/20: reported operating profit of £627m, reported profit after tax of £136m

We do not record and report the volume that is discharged through storm overflows. This is technically challenging to do so and there are no reliable or widely adopted solutions available for this at present. We do report on the frequency and duration of every storm overflow operation in the North West from a United Utilities asset and this can be found on our website [here](#). We first published this data in 2020 for around 85% of overflows – by the end of 2023, 100% of our overflows will be monitored.

**Q. Are the shareholders going to take a smaller pay-out to assist in the cost of your plans? Especially as £300,000,000 was recently paid out to them.**

We will need additional investment to finance the investment programme we have set out. We rely on investment to enable us to fund our investment programmes now. We pay interest on debt and a dividend on equity investment in return for them making the investment possible today, but spread the costs in customer bills over a long period of time. We are a long-term business, and we have a long-term and sustainable financing policy to attract and retain investors to enable us to invest in services for customers. You can read more about the approach we take to making decisions on dividends in our Annual Performance Report. For 2023, this is set out on pages 129 – 132 of our report, available here: <https://www.unitedutilities.com/globalassets/documents/pdf/united-utilities-annual-performance-report-2022-23>