

Vulnerability and Affordability Report 2018/19



Expanding support and embedding partnerships

over
118,000
customers

received
financial
help with
their bill

over
£13m
in support

funded by
United Utilities
to help
customers
with their bills

over
40%
increase

in customers
registered
for Priority
Services

Here are some of the ways we've done it...

Launched the new 'Hardship Hub', empowering the advice community by enabling access to all the available support

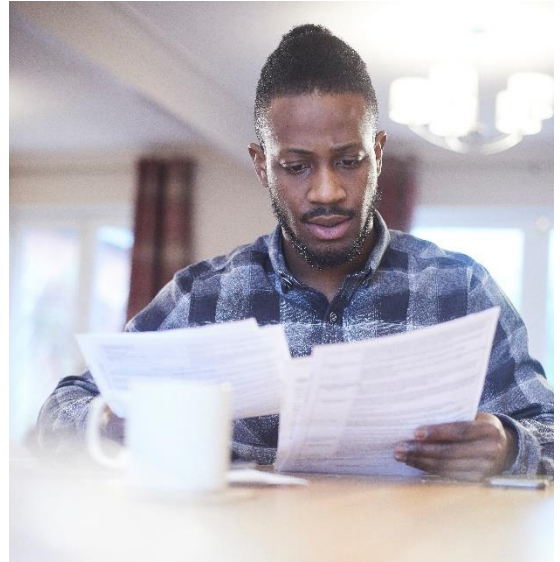
Dispelled myths about metering, promoting the benefits of having a free water meter fitted

Increased use of third party data to engage those most likely to be in need of support, and leading industry trials of new data shares

Help for those who need it most

United Utilities provides vital water and wastewater services across the North West region. Like all service providers, we have a responsibility to assist our customers who can find themselves in vulnerable situations. This report lays out our framework for assisting customers in vulnerable circumstances, and the support we provide to customers who face challenges affording their water bill.

By publishing this report we hope to prompt further engagement with other service providers and organisations, plus promote open collaboration to improve the support that is offered to customers who need it most.



Our affordability support



Setting an affordable but sustainable payment plan arrangement that is right for each individual is key. The Resolution Foundation found that 70% of low and middle-income households have less than one-month's income in reserve, so avoiding bill shocks and providing structured payment plans can do a lot to help households manage budgets.

We look to 'bundle' schemes together to address historic debt and provide an affordable ongoing bill. This year our focus has been embedding and expanding access to support.

Our dedicated affordability team is trained to recognise signs of affordability challenges and better understand a customer's financial situation.

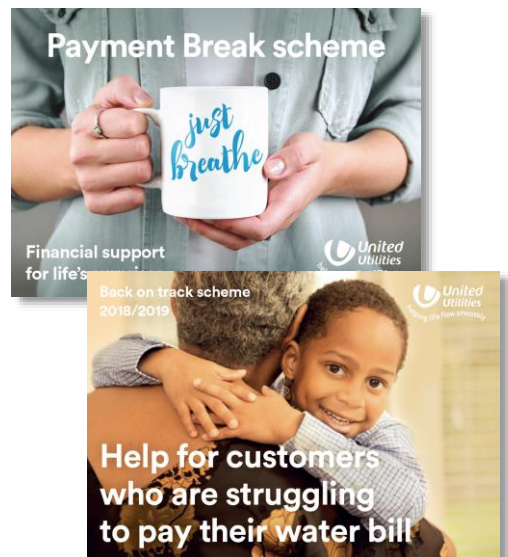
Details of all the ways we can help those struggling to pay their bills can be easily found at unitedutilities.com/help-and-support

Our affordability support

Our financial assistance schemes:

Back on track	A fixed bill at a lower, affordable level for homes behind on their water bills and on a lower income.
Help to pay	A capped bill, based on income, for customers that receive Pension Credit.
Payment Matching+	For every £1 of debt a customer pays off, we'll match it. After six months, for £1 they pay, we'll pay £2. If payments are kept up for two years then all remaining water debts are cleared.
Payment Break	A delay in bill payment to help if a customer is struggling with a temporary change in circumstances.
UU Trust Restart	A one-off grant from the UU Trust Fund for customers in real financial difficulty in need of a fresh start.
Water Direct	It can help some customers to budget for their bills by applying to the DWP to pay their bill direct from their benefits.
WaterSure	A capped bill for measured customers on benefits who use a lot of water due to ill health or a large family.

The number of customers receiving direct financial support has increased year on year:



Our vulnerability support



Vulnerability and its causes are often complex. Being aware of the reasons why a customer may be in these circumstances is important in understanding what support they need, and understanding whether this extra support is a permanent or temporary requirement. This year we have focused on expanding support and embedding partnerships.

Details of how we can help those who might benefit from additional support can be easily found at unitedutilities.com/help-and-support

Partnership working

Throughout the year we have been embedding established partnerships. Through these partnerships we're accessing new information, learning from others, and creating new ideas.



We continue to data share with Electricity North West, with over 20,000 Priority Services register records shared to date between both companies.

We've established a calendar of 'multicultural events and holidays' to minimise impact on all customers during planned works around the region.

North West Affordability Summit



#NWAffordability

In January 2019, we held our second annual North West Affordability Summit, where once again we were joined by representatives from debt organisations and charities who operate in the North West and at a national level.

It was opened by Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, and delegates provided their insight into the issues facing customers. This helped to generate new areas for us to focus on, resulting in the following new themes of activity being identified:

Embedding the North West Hardship Hub

Developing an Ethical Claims Charter

Services and support for tenants

Changing perceptions of debt, promoting support

Continuing to improve support

We've recently developed our business plan proposals for 2020–25, in which we've set out our plans to improve the range and quality of the affordability and vulnerability support that we provide to customers.

- UU's largest ever bill reduction, helping to support moving 250,000 customers out of water poverty by 2025
- By 2025, provide financial support sufficient to lift an additional 66,500 customers out of water poverty
- Provide £71m of support to over 152,000 customers a year through financial assistance schemes
- Extend our Priority Services offering to over 210,000 customers, and improve the quality and scale of the support we provide
- A Lowest Bill Guarantee for customers that could benefit from a water meter, but are worried they might lose out

Following enhancements in regulatory reporting requirements from next year, we will review consolidating affordability and vulnerability performance reporting into established annual regulatory reports.

Get in touch

We want to share ideas and collaborate with others to make services to vulnerable customers even better. If you are part of a company or organisation that would like to work with us on this, then we want to hear from you.

- For affordability ideas, contact chris.lea@uuplc.co.uk
- For ideas around customer vulnerability, contact amanda.phillips@uuplc.co.uk

Priority Services help

If you would like more information or to register for Priority Services, please:

- visit our website: unitedutilities.com/priorityservices
- call us on **0345 672 2888**

If you have a family member, friend or neighbour who might benefit from a little extra support, please let them know about Priority Services. It is completely free to our customers in the North West – and you don't have to be the named bill payer to benefit.