



SUPPORTING OUR CUSTOMERS

WORKING AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

SUMMARY



Dŵr Cymru
Welsh Water

FOREWORD

PETER PERRY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

At Welsh Water, our not for profit operating model enables us to put our customers first and we want to ensure that the services we provide are not only sustainable but also affordable to all our customers.

We know that there is an increasing number of households experiencing financial poverty, and despite the fall in inflation and energy prices over recent months, disposable incomes are still being squeezed. This is compounded by the relative higher levels of deprivation in the communities we serve here in Wales compared to the rest of the UK.

Arguably, this strategy 'Supporting Our Customers – Working at the Heart of Our Community' which outlines our plan to support customers who need extra help, has never been more important.

It builds on the successes we have achieved to date. This includes supporting a record 130,000 vulnerable customers who struggle to pay their bills, which is one of the highest

levels of support for any water company in England and Wales. It also means continuing to do things differently as shown by our latest support scheme, Cymuned. This is the only scheme of its kind in the sector and is aimed at providing working household customers with temporary support to pay their water bills if their household bills exceed their income.

We cannot do this alone and this is why we work with over 300 local organisations (including Citizen's Advice, StepChange, Warm Wales, housing associations and foodbanks) to help identify customers who may need support. This collaboration is essential to helping us deliver this latest strategy.

As an anchor company here in Wales and provider of essential services, we believe in doing what's right and it is our duty to ensure that we remain embedded in our communities, so every customer gets the support they need.



FOREWORD

LESLEY GRIFFITHS MS

CABINET SECRETARY FOR CULTURE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

On behalf of the Welsh Government, I am pleased to see Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water reaffirming its commitment to social responsibility, by supporting the most vulnerable households in our society.

Dŵr Cymru's support includes crucial relief to those who need it most, by easing both the burden of financial stress and the pressure on overall finances for affected families.

This support is further complemented by adherence to the industry wide Priority Services Register (PSR) which offers additional services to customers who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances for many reasons including disability, sight or hearing impairment, chronic and serious illness and being of pensionable age. With the number of customers registered for the PSR having quadrupled over the past five years, I welcome the company's plans to continue to grow awareness of the availability of this service over the coming years.

Dŵr Cymru's work aligns with the Welsh Government's broader goals of promoting social justice. We all have a part to play and this strategy and associated actions highlight the importance of integrating social responsibility into business practices, thereby fostering more inclusive and supportive communities.

The Welsh Government is fully committed to social justice and equity. We recently published our National Equality Objectives and Long-Term Aim for 2024-28. These provide the foundation for our work to eliminate inequality, promote equality and foster good relations between people. They reflect our focus on creating a Wales which will provide fair access to services for all and deliver fairer outcomes for our diverse people and communities across Wales.

We also remain focused, particularly during the current economic uncertainties, on continuing to drive forward with our

commitment to tackle poverty by prioritising the needs of the poorest and protecting those most at risk of poverty and exclusion. Ensuring water affordability for vulnerable households is an important component of our approach to help secure better outcomes for everyone in Wales, and we are proud of the legislation and initiatives we have introduced to tackle poverty.



OUR STRATEGY

DATA

As a water company, we hold personal data so that we can provide our customers with the services that they require. Other utilities, local authorities, health authorities and social landlords hold similar information and by working effectively with them, as well as turning our internal sources of information into meaningful insight, we can fully understand the needs of our customers and ensure that they are able to access the extra help they need quickly and with minimal effort.

We will work with our partners to identify opportunities for data sharing that allows us to proactively identify customers that need financial and non-financial extra help. We will also use internal and external data sources to monitor the impact of our vulnerability strategy, as well as understand how satisfied customers are with these services.

What we will do:

- ✔ Continue with our current data sharing and data insight activities
 - ✔ Explore new data sharing opportunities, including the expansion of data sharing with the energy sector and the introduction of financial data sharing
 - ✔ Introduce new metrics to help to monitor effectiveness and progress of this vulnerability strategy
 - ✔ Expand external data sources to improve our understanding of the extra help needs of underrepresented customer groups and how we need to adapt our current services to accommodate them
 - ✔ As we roll out smart meters from 2025, provide customers billed on unmeasured charges information about their water usage to help them understand if it would be financially advantageous to be on a meter.
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OUR SPECIALIST
SUPPORT
TEAM DELIVER
SUPPORT TO
CUSTOMERS
WHO NEED
EXTRA HELP



HERE FOR YOU

ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT DESIGNED AROUND CUSTOMER NEED

We have a long-established Priority Services Register which ensures that customers that need extra help are able to access our services in a way that meets their particular circumstances.

This ranges from accessible communications to bottled water deliveries during incidents.

Equally, we support households with a variety of financial assistance measures: social tariffs, debt support schemes, flexible payment plans and forbearance schemes, metering and water efficiency advice.

We will ensure that our services are designed around the needs of our customers and make sure that they evolve as those needs change or as we learn more about our customers. We will ensure that we are accessible to our customers, providing communications and communication channels that take account of the barriers that some of them face, such as not speaking English or Welsh as a first language, learning disabilities, neurodiverse conditions, and sight and hearing impairments.

We know that some of our non-household customers have water reliant premises because of the services they provide to customers who need extra help. We will ensure that our incident response teams recognise the criticality of our services to these customers and prioritise their response accordingly.

What we will do:

- ✓ Continue with our current range of extra help services
- ✓ Minimise the impact of future bill rises on low-income households by using our financial surpluses to finance growth of our financial assistance schemes
- ✓ Undertake periodic reviews of our range of financial and non-financial extra help to determine development of future services
- ✓ Undertake annual customer research with customers receiving extra help to identify areas for improvement
- ✓ Work with water reliant non-household customers to identify opportunities to improve the support we provide during incidents
- ✓ Amend our leakage code of practice to take account of the needs of micro-businesses
- ✓ Introduce online application for WaterSure Wales
- ✓ Use the feedback from the newly introduced customer research into incidents across the sector to improve our communication with customers
- ✓ Introduce digital customer journey audits to improve the accessibility of our digital services and the content on our website
- ✓ Improve and expand our third-party referral process for support for customers in debt
- ✓ Use new smart metering capability to provide more frequent and more timely consumption information to customers that require this service
- ✓ Introduce accessibility monitoring for the website
- ✓ Introduce 'Plain Numbers' for customer bills
- ✓ Address the key findings in relation to accessibility of services coming out of the Blue Marble customer research.



SUPPORTING OUR CUSTOMERS

WE'RE FIXING LEAKING
LOOS IN YOUR AREA



DYN TRWSIO TAI
SY'N GOLLWNG
I'R FACH ARDAL

<http://www.watn.co.uk/cortref>

TRAINING & AWARENESS

We have teams working across our operating area, speaking to customers daily. Along with our supply chain and the many partners that we work with, this provides us with a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the support we can offer, as well as respond to the individual circumstances facing a customer.

We will seek to maximise the impact of our people and partners through targeted training that helps them build empathy with customers, allowing them to assess what extra help is needed and ensure that this help is delivered as quickly as possible. We will ensure that our people understand the full scope of our services that we offer and the routes to accessing them. We will also provide them with the capability and confidence to understand the small changes that can be made when a different approach is needed in order to address the specific extra needs of a customer.

What we will do:

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- ✓ Continue with current training and awareness activities
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- ✓ Introduce annual training for all employees and those in our supply chain on how to recognise the signs that a customer needs extra help and how to respond
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- ✓ Incorporate lessons from research carried out by CCW and Ofwat into incidents in other companies into our incident response processes
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- ✓ Develop online training for our partner network
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- ✓ Expand the range of internal communications 'collateral' promoting our services across all field based and support teams
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- ✓ Address the key findings relating to training and awareness coming out of the Blue Marble customer research.
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COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

We have a long tradition of working with other organisations to deliver better outcomes for our communities. We have seen on many occasions that we can achieve far more when we collaborate with our customers and the agencies that speak on their behalf. These agencies provide valuable insight into our customers' lives and the impact that our services are having. More importantly, they are trusted by our customers and will often be the first point of contact when they are in a difficult situation. We are now working with over 300 organisations across our operating area to raise awareness of the extra help we provide, as well as responding to individual customer needs.

We will continue to build meaningful partnerships with organisations that represent the diverse needs of our customers. We will work with them to maximise the reach of our services, as well as get insight into the impact of those services and identify opportunities for improvement. We will maximise our community presence to raise awareness of our services, provide outplacement support and address wider local needs.

What we will do:

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- ✓ Continue with current community and partnership activities
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- ✓ Develop community partnership 'clusters' to help target support in areas
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- ✓ Create more Water Resilient Community projects
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- ✓ Establish a framework for collating feedback from partners to help drive improvements in our priority services and financial assistance schemes
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- ✓ Address the key findings relating to communities and partnerships coming out of the Blue Marble customer research.
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OUR COMMITMENTS

Maintain the company contribution of £14m per annum to fund financial assistance schemes

Grow awareness of our financial and non-financial support

Annual Water Resilient Community projects

All colleagues trained on how to recognise and respond to the signs of vulnerability

Maintain the ISO 22458:2022 consumer vulnerability standard

Host an annual event to share best practice with partners, stakeholders and other utility companies

Develop our insight models, with external data sources, to identify the needs of customers and develop strategies to target our marketing and promotion activities in underserved areas

Establish a vulnerable customer panel to test satisfaction with our current services and new services that we develop

Annual board review of our progress against the commitments in our Vulnerability Strategy.



SUPPORTING OUR CUSTOMERS

OUR HELP

We understand that there are many reasons why customers may need extra help to access our services. It may be a long-standing health condition or a life event that creates a short-term change in their financial or personal circumstances. We aim to respond to the different circumstances and needs through our Priority Services and Financial Assistance schemes:

PRIORITY SERVICES

- Priority contact for supply interruptions
- Alternative water supply during interruptions for customers on the PSR and vulnerable sites
- Accessible bills: large print; coloured background; Braille; CD/MP3; read bills over the phone; send bills to a friend or relative
- Home visits to discuss bills and payments
- Accessible contact: Text Relay Service; accessibility settings on our website to change the text, language and colour; Live Chat in our Specialist Support team for Priority Services and Financial Assistance queries; British Sign Video service on our website
- Nominee: appoint a friend, relative or carer to deal with account queries, payments and matters relating to our water and wastewater services
- Password scheme: protect our customers from bogus callers by setting up a password that our teams will always use when visiting or contacting.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Spread the cost of bills with payment plans
- Ability to return to unmeasured charges within 2 years of a meter being fitted
- Short term payment breaks
- Social tariffs: capped bills for low-income households (HelpU) and metered households with large families or someone with a medical condition that requires significant use of extra water (WaterSure Wales)
- Support schemes: Customer Assistance Fund for customers in severe financial hardship to clear arrears and get on top of their payments; Water Direct for customers that pay their charges and outstanding arrears through their benefits; Cymuned Support Fund for working households with negative budgets which provides a 3 month 'charge free' period
- Advice: Benefit Checker (Turn2Us); Water efficiency audits.