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# PR24

**NORTHUMBRIAN  
WATER** *living water*

**ESSEX & SUFFOLK  
WATER** *living water*

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**YOUR WATER, YOUR SAY**  
**THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2023**

**WRITTEN RECORD**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ARE VALID AS AT 9 NOVEMBER 2023**

A large, stylized graphic of water splashing from the top right corner, rendered in white and light green, set against a dark green background. The water is depicted with multiple curved, parallel lines that create a sense of motion and volume.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION (1)**

Kevin Johnson introduced himself as independent chair, appointed by Ofwat and CCW, for the Your Water, Your Say (YWYS) public online meeting(s).

He welcomed participants and informed them that the session was being recorded, for administrative purposes.

Kevin outlined housekeeping rules.

He went on to give an overview of the periodic price review process (currently PR24) as well as the role of Northumbrian Water Limited – Northumbrian Water in the Northeast of England and Essex & Suffolk Water in the Southeast. He also explained the roles of Hartlepool Water, Anglian Water and Thames Water.

Kevin acknowledged the different areas, very different geographic profiles, very different population profiles, and different services.

Kevin outlined his role in the process – “to facilitate a constructive challenge session as part of the price review process.” He explained “This is a challenge session, so I actively encourage a challenging, robust and I'm sure possibly at times passionate exchange of information, experience, questions and answers.”.

He explained that the company would make a 15-minute presentation on their priorities for the future across all its geographic and service areas. Kevin would then facilitate at least an hour for questions and answers in four themed blocks:

- Good quality water
- Cleaner waters and healthy assets
- Environmental improvements
- Bills, customer service and investment

## **2. PRESENTATION**

**Heidi Mottram, Chief Executive Officer, made a presentation on behalf of the company.**

## **3. INTRODUCTION (2)**

Kevin thanked Heidi.

He reiterated the themes that questions would be taken in and outlined how the question taking would be facilitated.

Kevin introduced Heidi's team from Northumbrian Water:

- Andrew Beaver, Regulation and Assurance Director
- Richard Warneford, Wastewater Director
- Kieran Ingram, Water Director
- Mark Wilkinson, Head of Income
- Alan Bryce, Independent Non-executive Director

#### **4. QUESTIONS ASKED WITHIN THE SESSION**

**Kevin Johnson Qa:** I'm just going to kick off with one or two questions. Heidi, before we get started on lots of great questions from your customers and stakeholders let's go back to one of the things you said. You said that you're sure that the rising bills would be unwelcome.

You recognise, I think, that we're still in, and could still be in for a while, a cost-of-living crisis, yet the bills are going to go up by almost 20% in some circumstances.

Almost half of the people you've consulted have told you that's going to be tricky for them. That's going to be unaffordable or nearly unaffordable. Have you got the balance right of this plan and how are you going to make sure that people do find it affordable?

**Heidi Mottram:** Thank you very much, Kevin. So, I think you probably gathered from what I said in my presentation, but if I could just really emphasise that this is probably one of the areas that we've given the most significant thought to both in all our consultations with customers, with our independent water forum and on Your Water, Your Say sessions as well. So, I've got Mark Wilkinson with me, and he can come in on the detail of this, but we already provide a significant amount of support and I think we know our customers really well.

And the best way to do that, because of course customers are individuals not a big group - I think one of the things we take very seriously is how we focus that specifically to help them with the particular circumstances that they have. And I think as a result of that we know we are supporting a lot of customers, but this plan from 2025 to 2030 sees a significant step up in that including a £20 million hardship from our shareholders. Maybe Mark, you might want to just come in and elaborate a little bit and then it looks like Andrew would like to possibly say a couple of things as well as Mark.

**Kevin Johnson:** Well, I'll tell you what, Mark, you can come in briefly because I'm sure we'll get into this issue more with your customers in that last category of questions. But just quickly add to Heidi's first answer.

**Mark Wilkinson:** I guess for us; we've focused on who's likely to need help over the last five-year plan actually and it's very much building on those issues. So, looking at how our bill might hit different groups of customers, how it might be different in Essex and Suffolk and the North, and how metering might play into some of that. So, we've tried to plan where we need to provide help where we think customers will see more of an impact than others and really look at that over a longer term. So, it's nice and sustainable.

Really, there's a benefit to us to make sure people are able to afford their bills because if they can't, then we end up with some other costs around bad debt. So, we're very keen on trying to work out the right level and we've put a lot of effort into working out where that incidence will be, which households might struggle more, and we try to tailor our support over this plan to those groups. But I'll talk a little bit more about that as you say later on.

**Kevin Johnson Qb:** Heidi if you can just answer this very briefly. And again, we'll come back to it. But up until now, the company has not been among the top performers when it comes to making their customers aware of the kind of support available. You've touched on obviously in your presentation and in your first answer about the additional support that's going to come in the next five-year period. The follow up question to that really is how are you going to make more people aware? The people on this call are, of course, becoming more aware of what you're going to do - but how about your wider customer base? How are they going to be made more aware that there are ways in which they can be helped by the company?

**Heidi Mottram:** I'll be honest with you Kevin, that's a position that we find incredibly frustrating because we do work really, really hard to try to make sure the awareness of our support is well known, but you're quite right that the data shows that we're not necessarily as good. We're not far off, but we're certainly not as good as some of the other companies. So, what we're going to try and do even more, is trying to talk to customers in places that they are already there for another reason.

I think with a strong track record of it working in partnership, so working through local authorities who already have connections with some of these customers, with charity partnerships like Step Change where we've had a long-standing partnership, we're going to try and see if we can get to people through other people's connections. As well as making all the connections that we do through, for example, putting information in our bills, on our website, through our social media, etcetera. We're going to try really, really hard to get that number up.

**Kevin Johnson Qc:** OK. Again, I'm sure we'll come back to it. Just one more for me and then we're going to come to people, and we've got hands up already and lots of questions in the chat. So, let's get through to those.

Are we being ambitious enough in this plan? Is there almost the flip side of my first question, Heidi, I'm thinking particularly. I'm sure people are going to come to the question about smart metering and particularly your plans in Essex and Suffolk. But what else are you going to do to help with the challenge of water consumption? Because again, that's not as good as it needs to be in terms of reducing the consumption levels in your service areas.

**Heidi Mottram:** So, this is an area again that we do work really hard on. We've had some very innovative solutions. For example, we've worked on a whole town approach where we've worked in partnership with local authorities and other organisations that are active in those communities. We found that to be very, very successful.

We're collaborating with the other water companies who are further on because they're getting really interesting information. That's allowing us to understand how people are interacting with their smart meters so that we can learn from and start to apply some of those learnings as well. So, we know this is a target we need to go after, and we're pretty confident that we can start to drive that, not just through smart metres but by some of the other activities we're doing as well.

**Kevin Johnson:** OK, I will remind everyone that we're focusing our questions on the company's plans for 2025 to 2030. Are their plans right, are they affordable etcetera? Do you believe that they can deliver what Heidi has set out today.

## 4.1. GOOD QUALITY WATER

**Question 1:** So, <name> says I've reported several leaks over a 40-year period. Frequently the leak has been reported already, often days before. May I suggest that the first person to report a significant leak, big or prolonged, receives a monetary reward or discount on their bill, if appropriate. The water companies rely on the general public, and they're no longer publicly owned. All that said, I find Northumbrian Water the best of all the utilities to deal with by a long way.

**Kieran Ingram:** We're obviously trying to work with our customers to help us identify leaks through innovation, through technology and lots of our customers are using technology to pinpoint some of our leakage for us. But I think it's something, yes, we should actually look at considering in terms of incentivisation. But there's also lots of people who want to do that for the community and also the different organisations that are working with us in from an environmental point of view. So, leakage is an area absolutely that we're focusing on, and we want to make sure we're doing better in that space.

I welcome all ideas to help us think about how we solve the leakage challenge that we have, but also about identifying leakage throughout the seasons.

**Kevin Johnson Question 2:** We have a follow up on that Kieran, just a bit similar to my question to Heidi on consumption. Are you being ambitious enough in terms of your leakage targets in in this period 2025-2030?

**Kieran Ingram:** So, I think we are. We know our customers are absolutely concerned about leakage and we set ourselves some very stretching targets to reduce leakage by 17 1/2% in Essex and Suffolk, and 15% in the North. And we're already among some of the lowest levels of leakage in the country. Suffolk being at just over 12.8%. So, I think these targets are particularly challenging, and I do think if you look at the last few years, we've made significant investment in achieving that and the best performance ever.

We're using innovation to keep going, we've included more people fixing more pipe work and we're using different technology to help us actually fix pipes quicker - without actually having to excavate for example. That's an industry first and that's really helping.

What I would lastly say is a high dimension of this, but we absolutely do care that water is a very precious resource. We don't want to waste it and that independent report showed that our company has some of the lowest levels of leakage in leakage in the UK, indeed, across Europe and we're determined to keep improving that.

**Question 3:** My name's <name>, and I live in Cullercoats. So about 20 minutes' walk from the sea, and you'll probably know there are lots of people who kayak and surfboard, paddle and swim in there and I am very concerned about the patchy water quality. I was just looking at some old papers and I wrote a letter to our local paper 26 years ago about water quality.

Northumbrian has been in charge of our water since 1989 and you know we've still got patchy water quality at Cullercoats. A couple of things. How can you convince people who live on the coast and would love to go in the sea but are wary that something will actually be done because like I say, 26 years ago, there were issues and there have been issues on and off ever since then. So, I'd like I'd like to know how we can believe that things are going to improve. And thanks for the talk, by the way - My drinking water is great.

But I didn't know that Suffolk pay half as much as we do. And when you think that, you know, people in our area are some of the poorest in the country. I'm quite shocked that we paid double the amount that Suffolk do. And I wondered if you could just give some explanation for that.

**Richard Warneford:** With regards to Cullercoats, so very quickly, we have 32 of our 34 bathing waters as a good or excellent. We've invested hundreds of millions of pounds, up and down the coast, to get to that position. Going back a while that position was probably in single figures - so, we're very proud of what we've done generally at the coast.

Cullercoats is one of the ones that isn't as good or excellent. We've done a huge amount of work in partnership with North Tyneside Council and with the Environment Agency. We've done all kinds of different work - investigations, physical work to remove surface water that connected into the system and all kinds of things. So, we've done a huge amount of work.

I guess it still remains stubbornly at the position where it isn't quite getting to the standards that everyone would want it to get to. It's worth pointing out always in these situations that there's not just Northumbrian Water who impact bathing waters. Cullercoats has a really interesting geology, with the cliffs there. It has a really interesting set up of being a harbour type beach.

What we will be doing with Cullercoats is meeting in the next month or so with the Council and then having a further discussion about what can happen next. Funnily enough I was at Cullercoats on Saturday walking along the beach myself and actually there were a lot of people kayaking and swimming. I think that the public, thankfully, still do have a lot of confidence and I think they should be able to use that beach which is a beautiful beach. I think what we'll keep doing is keep working with the partners, which we've got a track record of doing well, and try and get Cullercoats at that position where it's like the rest of the bathing waters in the North.

**Heidi Mottram:** Just to build quickly on there with Richard, it's a bit of a conundrum is Cullercoats. So, we can't work out what's causing the issue, but it's not through lack of trying. And I think that's what Richard is trying to land on you and there's a lot of people trying to work out what the issue is.

The other question you mentioned. My apologies if we've confused you, in our Essex and Suffolk area, we're a water only company. So, the bill is combined with a wastewater bill, which normally comes from Anglian Water or Thames Water, depending on where customers live. Where in the Northeast, you're thinking that your bill is double because it includes water and wastewater charges. So that's why it's not a bigger bill. It's just the fact we only do half the half of the service provision in Essex and Suffolk.

**Question 4:** I'm a resident of Leiston, which is the nearest town to the site of a nuclear power station. So, it is a bit of a techy one but a very difficult one.

We followed the water supply issue for the proposed site. We'll see a twin nuclear reactor power station for probably over 12 years, and we agree the stance that was taken by your lawyers, Walker Morris, in the planning inquiry, which took place in 2022. In that we understood entirely that you could not guarantee a water supply to the power station. At the last minute, the developer proposed a temporary desalination plant. Now looking at your options that you have for water supply, you appear to now indicate a desalination plant permanently which would feed water to the local supply and ultimately another water supply to the river Waveney via a new pipeline to Barsham.

The reason for the question is that we've recently had meetings with the Environment Agency and we're in dialogue with the Office of Nuclear Regulation, which indicate how critical the water is to the nuclear safety. The issue is there is no operating history of desalination plants in close vicinity with nuclear power stations, which in themselves have quite a track record. But it's fairly well documented in terms of the pollution that is the extra pollution that is going into the marine environment which must then be drawn on to allow you to desalinate.

**Kieran Ingram:** I'm happy to follow up after if necessary.

I think it's a great question because maintaining a resilient supply of water in Suffolk area for the future is something incredibly important to both us and our customers. You know we're actively planning to make sure that we can continue to meet the area's needs, taking into account those challenges, climate change and our responsibilities in the environment. And again, accommodating growth we have published in our draught water management plan that sets out the idea of providing reliable and sustainable water looking 40 years into the future, into the future. Of course, Sizewell is one component of overall demand in the area.

At present, we do not have sufficient water resources within the area. So, our draft plan is setting out how we might look at that in the future with a range of options from reuse plants to desalination to further pipe work and also to storage. So that is all that has been provided, and we have shared that within the plan.

I am more than happy to talk through specific schemes with you, as they do get quite techy.

*Kevin reminded <name> to leave his contact details with CCW if he wanted to have a follow up conversation with Kieran.*

**Question 5:** I can see Prudhoe Castle from my house. I know you buried a pipeline within a farmer's field in Northumberland, which is nice, but now it starts to flood. The question I want to ask Heidi is a daft question. She talks about Essex, and I lived in London for 30 years, about how their water quality is better. How can you say it? Communication throughout the world would get us better quality because we have fantastic reservoirs who were all pumped down to Manchester and everything like that. I just want to know why we don't have the best water in the world.

**Kevin Johnson:** OK. Rob, apologies. You're cutting out a little bit certainly for me. So, I'll ask you to turn your camera off, and keep your mic on. Heidi, the question, from <name> - Why has Northumbrian not got the best water in the world?

**Heidi Mottram:** I think I would argue that we do.

It was obviously a little bit difficult because <name> kept dipping in and out. I think he was asking us about drinking water quality and I can tell him and all that all our customers, both in Essex and Suffolk and in in Northumbrian Water that they have very high drinking water quality and you're probably quite right, <name>, if you look at the drinking water quality in the UK as a whole, it's very, very high and ours is high amongst that.

You should feel very pleased and proud, and particularly because we've got fantastic resources in the Northeast, like Kielder Reservoir. So hopefully that gives him the reassurance he was looking for in his question.

**Question 6:** <Name> sent a question in. He's lived in the Northeast of England all his life, 76 years and was praising up the quality of the water in the past but says nowadays or more recent years it's undrinkable due to a chemical taste. We've had the water tested and Northumbrian Water have stated that it's OK, but I can assure you it's full of chemicals, at least to the taste. Please ask the question, what's wrong with the taste of water and how can it be brought back to the lovely tasting water that we used to have for many years.

**Kieran Ingram:** Let me say that firstly, I'm sorry to hear that our customer doesn't feel that we have great tasting water, and I'd love to follow with them although it sounds like we may have already engaged. To reassure you, we measure a number of our customers' tap water and everyone who contacts us or complains about the taste or odour or smell. And we actually have an excellent record and are typically one of the best performers in this space.

Our customers are very sensitive to the variations in water. A bit like you might have seen behind the scenes of how tea is made. For example, we actually blend water from different sources, and we actually have independent tasters who continuously monitor that.

So not only are we looking at it from a chemical balance and from a regulatory point of view, but we're also tasting the water regularly to make sure customers do have great tasting water and it is consistent as well. Although we do put chemicals into it from a safety perspective, things like chlorine, to make sure it's safe. Absolutely it's a number one priority to make sure that also it's great tasting.

**Question 7:** <Name> asks with regards to smart meters. Will these be producing an hourly or daily read, and if so, how will this data be accessible for customers? For instance, will there be an app or a dashboard? These could really help educate customers on water usage and reduce consumptions consumption and leaks.

**Mark Wilkinson:** The quick answer is that the standard position will be hourly reads. We will talk to customers about whether that is what they want, but our default position is hourly reads. That's useful because it can allow us to detect leakage particularly in customer supplies. And that's one of the things we want to be able to tell customers if we pick it up. We do already have dashboard functionality on our app for customers who already have smart metres.

So again, we can show you that daily, weekly, yearly. You can look and compare week to week. It's really quite a neat little solution. I've had one myself for a while. So, you do find yourself looking at usage like you might do with your energy. So absolutely that'll be the easiest way for you to see that data.

**Question 8:** <Name> says I don't have a water metre in my flat. I contacted Essex and Suffolk Water to ask them about installing one. They said because I'm in a ground floor flat, and there's one other flat above us in the Victorian house, they wouldn't know where the pipes split between the two flats. Therefore, they need to get a plumber out to find out, remove the floorboards and put pipe work in so there could be a convenient place for a metre. This will cost several hundred pounds that <name> says she doesn't have, so she asks if the water companies want everyone to have water metres installed would their engineers offer to undertake this kind of work as part of the incentive to get a meter installed? There must be many other customers in my predicament.



**Kevin Johnson:** Obviously, we had that in advance. So, <name> may not have heard what Heidi said earlier. I suppose the broader question is how is the compulsory metering roll out going to work, particularly for somebody in <name>'s circumstances?

**Kieran Ingram:** She's talking about something that we call a shared supply. So, it's not a single supply into a property, which is something absolutely we're looking at. And if the plan is agreed, across Essex and Suffolk, we would be looking compulsory metering and working with households to look at ways to install a meter. There are innovations we can look at for shared supplies and also, we do have plumbing facilities and we'll be looking at options to work with those customers as well. Absolutely, it's something we'd investigate, and it'll be part of our programme to make sure that all our customers have the ability to monitor usage and have access to a smart meter.

**Question 9a:** I'm in South Shields. I've just had a water metre fitted a few months ago and this talk of smart meters I've never even heard of it. So, is it the same thing?

**Kieran Ingram:** Meters have been around for a while, so a great question. And thanks <name>. So, meters have been around for a while in our network, but also in individual customers' properties. Smart meters are probably the next generation and you're seeing that more through the energy companies. They are now coming into water and the difference is instead of having to manually come and read a meter or you know, only getting a signal that would provide that on a frequency of quarterly and actually having to have somebody drive by to pick up the signal from meter, they would actually give us the data in more in real time. To Mark's point earlier, being able to see that maybe on an hourly basis or even instantaneously in the future.

**Question 9b:** How do I know if I've got a smart meter? Because I think that I don't have to send any readings, so I might have a smart meter then and not even know it.

**Kieran Ingram:** You'll have a variation of what we call a smart meter. So, what we're talking about is two different things. So yes, the meter that you'd have had installed will mean that you don't need to read it. And most of our customers don't need to read them meter anyway because we have a meter service that would read it and most of our meters outside of properties are smart meters.

The next generation would mean that you have the facility to kind of read real time through an app or through our website to see your own usage. Obviously, technology is moving constantly, and as Heidi said, we're learning from other water companies who are a little bit ahead in terms of their meters.

New technology is becoming that the same ways across industry, but absolutely happy to take your details and explain how this works and how you can access the detail from your metre.

**Question 9b:** How can how can I do that?

**Kieran Ingram:** Well, we'll take your details down and we will be able to come back to you in person.

**Question 10:** I'm in Greater London and I'm on the smart meters. Obviously, we have smart meter for gas and electricity and one of my questions was going to be is the smart meter for water going to be separate or can it be combined with the gas and electricity? So, it has like a water sign rather than having multiple smart meters.

**Kieran Ingram:** I think that's a fantastic question.

We are looking through innovation, at how we can share data more openly with other utilities. And so, I think it's absolutely something we should be looking at and something we are already starting to think about. The only challenge we have is obviously you have the ability to change between different providers in terms of electricity, gas, telecoms etcetera, and in water obviously it stays fixed. So, we're just trying to look at how we might do that and obviously the way that we meet physically.

We are looking at how water comes into your house versus electricity or gas or telecommunication. So, I'd love to say yes, we should be working much closer together and provide you a more single source. I think that's a chance for us to take away and think about as an industry, absolutely.

**Question 11 (Kevin Johnson):** Kieran, when will people know how this plan, particularly in Essex and Suffolk, is going to work. How will people know when that plan is ready and how that roll out is actually going to work?

**Kieran Ingram:** If the plan is agreed, we will start to communicate with all our customers and what we generally do, is do it in catchment areas. We then can spend a lot of time in those communities, with the local authorities and individual customers, to talk about that roll out plan - what it would mean in terms of any disruption in the area and also your own physical installation as well. We've got a good track record of doing this and obviously we're learning from other roll outs across the country as well. We want to make sure that it has as minimal disruption to our customers as possible.

**Question 12:** <Name> asked, I understand that some of the ways Essex and Suffolk water aim to meet water supply demand in water stressed areas is to reduce domestic consumption by over 30% to 110 litres per day in the future, as well as the introduction of smart meters. Can or will Northumbrian Water in Essex and Suffolk ever use smart metres to ration domestic use to ensure domestic customers do not exceed targeted consumption levels?

**Kieran Ingram:** I think absolutely it's an ambitious target for us to reduce our overall what we call PCC. Our per capita consumption target. We know how precious a resource water is. I would assure our customers we've been looking ahead to manage our storage to make sure that we don't have to take any measures like hose pipe bans. We have confidence in our plans going ahead not just in the next five years, but also in a long-term delivery plan, to make sure we have enough water for our customers that we would never need to do anything like that.

#### **4.2. CLEANER WATERS AND HEALTHY ASSETS**

**Question 13:** <Name> asks, what are you doing now about sewage in our seas? This question is not about what you're going to do at some distant point in the future, but what are you going to do now? **Kevin Thompson** reminded attendees that the purpose of this session is to discuss the Company business plan for 2025-30.

**Richard Warnford:** Thanks for the question. I think we've already done a huge amount around bathing waters. As I was able to say earlier, 32 out of 34 of our bathing waters are good or excellent, and we have invested hundreds of millions of pounds up and down the coast to actually achieve that. So, a huge amount of work goes into this and a reminder that, of course, lots of other things can contribute to bathing water quality. But from our perspective, we've invested extremely heavily and will do going forward with bathing waters and with rivers.

We have a huge investment programme which totals almost a billion pounds. It's one of the biggest, most ambitious investment programmes we've ever had, in any area, which will focus on reducing storm overflow spills right across the patch. They can impact bathing waters and can also impact rivers. So, a big plan going forward. But we've already done a huge amount and the statistics back up that our coast and bathing waters are very safe to swim in.

**Question 14:** Good evening. I'm in Hexham on the Tyne in Northumberland. I'm a customer of Northumbrian Water and until recently I was swimming in parts of the Tyne, but I've stopped having found out the levels of sewage overflow that happen in this area, which are really very high now. I realise we're talking about the future. The past has been really very shocking. What I've also found out is that Northumbrian Water is actually owned by a Hong Kong Infrastructure Holdings Company, which creamed off £100 million worth of dividends in 2022. That was in the financial year ending in 2022. So, they are taking a lot of money while it seems to me

that a lot of their really quite horrific sewage overflows that are to do with the lack of investments because there is monitoring of these flows, but they're not stopped. So, there's one in Colwell. I found out that was leaking untreated or partially treated sewage for half of 2022 without being stopped.

It was monitored but not stopped. Now this is very concerning. I appreciate that you will work very hard and that you're trying to improve, but if there's not enough investment because too much money is going to shareholders, then how can you reassure us that in the future money will actually be spent stopping sewage outflows into the into these rivers.

We talk about the coastal waters, the coastal waters are clean enough, most of them, the rivers really aren't. And there's a group further down the river from me who applied for bathing status. And it wasn't given because there's such high levels of E-coli in the river. These are really unhealthy rivers. So, what reassurances can you give us that proper investment rather than investment to shareholders in other countries is going to be given to the system in this part of the world? Thank you.

**Kevin Johnson:** Let's just bring in Alan first to quickly answer that the first bit in terms of the ownership and dividends piece that Zaria touched on and then we'll come back to storm overflows and the environment.

**Alan Bryce:** I think I think the first point I would make is that the company is investing massive amounts of money already in improving water quality. And if you look at a plan for the next five-year period, we'll be investing something like 5 billion pounds in total, and 3.6 billion of that is investment in capital projects. There was a long-term project to help improve the quality.

Now you raise the question about dividends and shareholders. If you look at the dividends that have been paid out, and I think the year you've quoted actually is an exceptional one, which I might ask Andrew just to explain in a moment. But if you look at that over the past three years, our shareholders have received about 4.3% return on their investment over a three-year period. If you put your money in the bank in a savings account, you'd be earning that. So, these are not excessive dividends, the big numbers are because we are dealing with very substantial investments in the business.

**Andrew Beaver:** Just to add a comment on Alan's point about dividends - two comments actually.

The first point Alan said it wasn't a typical year. In the two years previous to that no dividends were paid at all. And so that was almost if you like a catch-up dividend. I think the key point here is the amount of investment that people are making, and you need to look at the percentage return rather than the total amount paid. I think that's the most important way to think about it.

The other point I wanted to make was that two years ago we restated our dividend policy as a company to make sure that all the dividends that we pay are directly aligned with performance for customers, so we already adjust the dividends to reflect that. If we are overspending against the price control - spending more than we should then shareholders cover that, and it can cover a large portion of that and that comes off the dividend. And if we fail to deliver the targets that we commit to in the business plan, then again that adjustment takes place in the dividend as well.

**Richard Warneford:** I mean there's a huge amount going on this area. I think there's a really, really sort of strong point well made, but if we can talk about first off in the Northeast the headline is that 30% of our rivers are at good status compared with 14% nationally. So, we start in a reasonably good place compared with others. But that doesn't mean we don't want to improve. Going forward, we have this £1 billion plan, which is a substantial plan to tackle the high priority storm overflows. It's likely that's likely to continue for a number of five-year periods.

What we're also going to do, and this will be live in December, so we're almost there, and almost live with it. We'll be publishing a live, or near real time map, where people can see the status of the rivers and the status of our assets at those rivers, so transparently sharing the data that we have, which we already do with organisations like Surfers Against Sewage - they already get that information and goes out through their app

that will be live this December. So, we're not waiting until next year, next business plan, the next five-year period. We have big improvement plans; we're going to share the data that we already have and that will be live by December.

**Question 15:** I am on the outskirts of Newcastle. I'm a trustee of the Reece Foundation. We are promoting the Ouseburn Way, where the Ouseburn is a very small river but seems to have an awful lot of sewerage in it. We're very conscious that in fact that you've got lots of river pollution. I'm fascinated as to how you decide whether to deal with the pollution in Hexham or Wylam or the Ouseburn or wherever. What are your criteria for deciding whether to put money into Hexham, Wylam or Ouseburn?

My other point is that I believe that you know the problems that you have that will be solved by scientists and by engineers. I wonder to what extent you are using science, and in particular science, but with engineering as well to reduce these costs and to get a better feel as to if you can spend £5 million on dealing with one. I think you might be planning to do, but broadly speaking if it's £5 million. Is it really going to make a massive difference in science in terms of the quality of the river?

**Richard Warneford:** As <name> knows, we're a partner on the Ouseburn Way - this scheme along with the Reece Foundation and the local authority and lots of other partners, including the Environment Agency. We're a big supporter of that. We were at the launch event recently. We're right behind that.

With regard to what happens with the prioritisation criteria set beyond us, they're set for us. It's worth setting that out first for understanding. The prioritised criteria set out, looks at a number of different things. It looks at that term, I've used before about the status of the river - whether it's a good status or not already. It'll look at things like whether there's a sensitive watercourse - for example, like a shellfish area or a special scientific interest area. It'll look at things like whether it's a bathing water and it'll look at things like spill numbers. So those criteria are set out for review and drive where we invest first. That's how that works. There's criteria set because and it's really important because it needs to be transparent and fair as people are passionate about the environment and especially their own water course.

We have 1,564 storm overflows that exist because we have a combined sewerage system. We can't cause flooding from the system, so the system has to have a pressure relief. What spills is not sewage and the things that we keep hearing people say. It's often heavily diluted. They tend to spill when there's heavy rainwater, that's what tends to happen.

But with regard to how the prioritisation happens, that's how things happen. The second bit of the question we absolutely base everything on science and it's both the traditional science- I happen to know that <name>'s an engineer, it's also the traditional sort of engineering type science that we know but also, we'd be looking at things like nature-based solutions.

We should be looking at how we get things to work more in tandem with nature. More in tandem with the biodiversity. Nature as well as the science and the engineering, that's absolutely how we look at it. There's nothing done without looking at it from an engineering way, but engineering sort of moves on as the traditional solid civil type engineering. It's that really innovative new nature-based engineering too.

**Kevin Johnson:** Richard, nature based seems to be one of those sorts of modern phrases which I'm sure not everybody quite understands what it might mean. So, unpick nature based a little bit for me.

**Richard Warneford:** If we think the simple way to handle, large amounts of surface water or rainfall might be for example to have more storage, a bigger network. So, you would just build bigger pipes, or you build bigger storage tanks. There are different ways where you can manage this.

To give a real example, we have one of the I think it's possibly the biggest nature-based solution already in existence in our Birtley sewage treatment plant where we treat mine water and effluent from a sewage treatment works collectively. We use reed beds where things will be passed through that system and then discharge more cleaned to a water course.

So, looking at how you bring those kinds of solutions in as well where you work in tandem with nature as well as building heavy or hard engineering. Hopefully that real example gives a bit of a flavour.

**Question 16:** Yeah, I'm. I'm based in Newcastle and I'm an open water swimmer. I was pleased to hear about what you were talking about earlier about Cullercoats, which I've swam in. I don't like swimming in there now because I'm not sure it's safe. I also have swum in the Tyne; I swim a private lake up in Northumberland.

I don't know what's safe and what's not safe to swim in, and when I spoke to Northumbrian Water the guy apologised and then I said how do I know it's safe to swim at Cullercoats? And he said, well go and try the Surfers Against Sewage website. And I thought that's ridiculous. Why aren't you telling me what's safe and what isn't safe? Because aren't you guys the sort of custodians of our water? And, you know, I've been following Fergal Sharky (and we are not related) but he has been hammering you guys in the water industry. You guys personally, you guys as companies. He's, you know, he's publishing. There's lots of scary things that are happening at the beach. I mean when you said 14% and 30%. So, we're doing well with 30%. I still think that's very, very low. Just help me out. I want to swim in, open air. I want to swim in the sea at Cullercoats or Tynemouth or whichever beach is safe.

I want to swim in the Tyne. It would be great if it was clean. It would be, you know. I'm asking for Utopia, and I'm probably not indoctrinated, but I've had my eyes opened by some of the campaigns that are out there and how many people are going to the beach and complaining about sewage. So, I sort of want, I don't want a plan about what we're doing in the next five years and what's happening in ten years and we're not giving as much to the shareholders. I want some sort of answer.

Just can I swim at the weekend at Cullercoats?

**Heidi Mottram:** Thanks very much for the question. And there's a few things in in that question if I can sort of go through them. I think the first thing, your namesake, I would say that he's making a lot of comments, but they're not typically associated with Northumbrian Water. In fact, if anything rarely associated, it's a shame that that things that happen in other parts of the country do sometimes end up confusing people and causing them a degree of anxiety. And I think that's what's causing you some of your anxiety.

<Name>, in terms of where you can hear the information about, you might not realise, but the Surfers Against Sewage website is actually driven by information from Northumbrian Water. We've been in partnership with them now for about ten years and that was a positive partnership to share information. So that information is us giving it to them. But actually, from the end of this year, Northumbrian Water will be publishing that information directly. If you want to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak, you'll be able to see that.

I think you also made a comment about the quality of rivers and of course, yes, 30% is better than 14%, but it's probably important also to point out that water companies are not the only cause of ecological status of rivers. Agriculture is pretty much the biggest one in terms of things coming from farms in our catchment areas and then things from roads and cities as well. So, there's a lot of work we need to do.

You may not have registered it, but I mentioned that in my presentation that we know what we need to do, we need to play our part, but we would like to work, and will work, in partnership with many other agencies and land owners to make sure that improvements come from other sources.

Everybody wants these rivers to become better, don't they? Then the last thing I'll probably mention is, and Richard I would imagine would come in on this as well if I don't finish it completely, but we're very well known as an innovative company and one of the things that we are very excited about, because we are thinking it will make a big difference, because I think <name> was wanting things to happen quickly, is we are looking at a solution known as a smart network for our sewers now.

We get a wee bit techy but basically, we can use our whole sewer network to store water more efficiently than we currently do using artificial intelligence and predictive data. So, our shareholders have already agreed investment in advance. We're going to start that work next year and we think this will make a big, big difference

to the way that our system is operating. So, we're super excited about that, not enough time to tell you all about it tonight, but anybody that's interested in that very happy to speak to you offline.

We are pushing hard on this and we're hoping to achieve improvements really quickly.

**Question 17:** OK, I live just north of Hexham in the parish of Humshaugh on the North Tyne.

You've got your plans to go online and it's good to know that they're going online. Is there any plan to monitor the volume of discharge? Are other water companies starting to look at volume because obviously a long duration with a small amount of sewage is nothing, whereas a short duration with a massive amount of sewage is a big deal. So, are you looking at improving your monitoring to cover discharge volume as well as duration?

**Richard Warneford:** At the moment, <name>, we're not. Just to give a bit of background, we're not typically permitted on volume, which I guess you probably know by the question. Actually, what we're looking to do more and more in the next part of the plan is to put more monitoring in the overflows themselves. So, we can start to understand the picture of what's actually happening there as well as actually in the rivers. So, we'll be absolutely doing a lot more monitoring. There are plans to do a lot more of that in the next five-year period.

#### **4.3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS**

**Question 18:** <Name> asks why the water industry has found itself in this position, i.e., lack of investment, debt, and poor environmental record.

**Heidi Mottram:** I think I was touching a little bit on the on this in the last question in the way that I answered it. A lot of what you're hearing in the media is generic to the water industry and not all water companies are the same. So, we've pushed really, really hard on making sure that we provide the best possible service for our customers, and I think our track record in terms of performance, upper quartile performance and leading performance is testament to that. Our shareholders have invested and backed us in that so it's difficult for me to get into too much detail.

I think you know we are a high performing company. We're not typical of the water industry and we will continue to push to provide the best possible services for our customers in the next five years as well as building on where we are now.

**Kevin Johnson:** Let me come back on that. It's an easy out, isn't it? Just to say it's the media's fault, all those bad reporting or they don't cover anything. And the comments earlier about Fergal Sharkey etcetera or you can point to things where you're particularly good at in Northumbria. But there are other things where you don't perform as well as other companies in the industry. Isn't the problem really that there hasn't been enough engagement, not only from your company but from other water companies as well. There's not been enough real connections, real openness and transparency with customers and stakeholders. Isn't that at the heart of the problem?

**Heidi Mottram:** I think it's quite challenging for us to get our voice heard in the national media. Maybe that's to do with the geography of where we are. But certainly, locally, and many of our customers on this on this line tonight will know this, we are very open and very transparent. The information that we give out through our website, through social media and through the local press, I think it's much easier there for us to give the information that people are interested in - the local information.

We meet regularly with user groups up and down the beaches. People who you know, want to have more access to rivers, etcetera. So, I think in the regions, we're very open and very transparent and we get our voice heard. It's just tougher sometimes in the national media.

**Question 19:** Hello there. I live in Essex.

I notice that the builders that are building extensions on properties where they should be putting the foul water into the foul water and the rainwater into the separate drainage. I have noticed that they're putting them into the same foul water which then obviously puts more pressure on the foul water system. This ends up flooding and everything goes into the rivers and the seas. So, I have approached building control and asked them about that, but they said that that is something that the water authority allows. Obviously, there is two different outlets, one for the foul, and one for the rain. So, whether it's to keep costs down or something like that, but why do they allow that?

**Kevin Johnson:** I think there's probably a broader theme that we're touching on about housing and population growth and working with developers and the issues that that causes and how the company deals with that.

**Richard Warneford:** I think it depends on where you are in the country as to what how your system is. There were some discussions there about the southern bits of the country, in the North we have of our setup as what we would call combined. It does actually take both surface water and sewage into the same system which is why we get these issues that we've talked about before, with the need for storm overflows because the surface water can inundate the system when you get really heavy rainfall. So that is how a lot of the system is.

In the South, in Essex and Suffolk, we only deal with the water. So that's all we're dealing with in the southern bit of the region.

**Kevin Johnson:** And more broadly, the issues of increasing development, increasing housing, etcetera and the issues that is giving to the water system. Richard, how are you managing that?

**Richard Warneford:** So, with the development side of things, we have really strong relationships with both the local authorities where we're sort of a statutory consultee - we get involved and are allowed to comment on the long-term plans. So, we know what the growth is from the point of view of each of the local authorities. We work on the basis of that development whether it's housing or industrial growth. We plan that into our systems and how we invest if you like in the systems going forward.

I'll not get too technical, but it's something which is known as a hierarchy of preference and what we're trying to do always is to find the most sustainable route for the water nowadays. For example, with rainwater we would look to make sure it went direct to a water course if we could. That's the way we're trying to work on it rather than it going into one of our systems where it can overload the system. We work exceptionally closely with developers, both the local authorities and the actual development companies. That's a big part of what we do.

**Question 20:** <Name> asks, I understand that rainwater harvesting, for example, by diverting rainwater from down pipes into water butts, helps to cut down on consumption and in preventing damaging surges from storms. What are Essex and Suffolk Water doing to help its domestic customers adopt rainwater harvesting measures?

**Kieran Ingram:** Overall, we are looking at lots of ways to help our customers in terms of their consumption and the way that they can reuse water. Common ways to look at things like water butts as an example to be able to harvest your own water and think about when you're watering your plants. This goes back to earlier discussions around our smart metering also being able to help customers understand their water usage. I don't think it's one solution. There's lots of ways that we're trying to look at reuse of water, at how our customers use their own water and also how we make sure that we have sustainable water, and we're working to reduce leakage, like we said earlier. So, I think these are all great things and absolutely if our customers are passionate about it, we're looking to share more hints and tips about water efficiency around their homes as well.

**Question 21:** Mr and Mrs <Name> say We understand Northumbrian Water's Kielder Water in Northumberland is a major generator of hydro-electric power and would like to see more reservoirs and rivers used in this way. Does Northumbrian Water have plans to expand its production of hydro-electric power? Why

have not, for example, has Cow Green Reservoir and the major rivers in the Northumbrian area, produced hydro-electric power recently (although renowned for this during the Industrial Revolution)?

**Andrew Beaver:** We have a big programme of trying to increase the amount of renewable energy generation that we do as a business. It's a win because it reduces our costs and makes us more efficient and, therefore lowers the bills for customers, and it also helps us on our journey towards net zero. We've made a lot of progress with that and we're very ambitious about it.

We're just pursuing the best options that we have and at the moment we do have some hydro options, but we also have a lot of land that we can use, for example for solar and we we're focusing on those opportunities first.

**Heidi Mottram:** I've been around a bit longer than Andrew with several hydro powered reservoirs. As Andrew said, we are investing heavily at the moment in solar, but the one that we're most famous for is power from poo where 100% of our sewage sludge is converted into power and that's a fantastic renewable energy source. That's why we're leading in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We've cut them by 90% since 2009. It's a great success story and in particular that power from poo is has made our operation really efficient and that has given customers money back in their pockets, which is why we've got low bills. So, it really is a win as Andrew said.

#### **4.4. BILLS, CUSTOMER SERVICE AND INVESTMENT**

**Question 22:** <Name> says our government has added to my water bill. Can you assure me that profits and shareholders dividends will not have increased again as you invest?

**Heidi Mottram:** I think what's been referred to here is obviously that we will be investing more, and improving the environment more, which we've talked about quite a lot through the session, but our profits are also regulated and controlled. The answer to that is they will be kept absolutely where they need to be. Alan spoke about that earlier - around roughly the return that we get is around four 1/2% which compares roughly to what you might get if you invested in a bank and so that'll be kept roughly at that level. We won't know exactly what level it is until Ofwat come back to us on the plan next year, but it should be in that kind of ballpark.

**Question 23:** <Name> says you're attempting to increase my monthly payments from £16 a month to £33 a month, an increase of over 100%. Please justify a monthly increase of 100%, which is over 14 times the official rate of inflation.

**Mark Wilkinson:** I think that's one we'll need to look at individually. The underlying charges have not gone up by anything like that that level. So, there's something peculiar about that gentleman's scenario. It may be that he's been paying a little bit too less on his budget and he's used a bit more water and it's adjusted for that. If we can get his contact details, we're quite happy to go and talk to him about that.

**Question 24:** My questions is back to sewage outflows. I've been looking at the stats from Defra. I understand that sewage treatment companies including Northumbrian Water are allowed to put sewage into water courses when it rains so hard that to contain it within their systems would mean it came up into people's bathrooms. Obviously, we want to avoid that. Unthinkable. But there is the volume, and the duration is actually longer than possibly needed.

At which point is it illegal to overflow sewage into water courses. So, some of Northumbrian Water's declared sewage outflow must be illegal or probably illegal. And I understand there may be legal consequences. Now, Heidi was saying it's difficult to communicate with the media, but I found an instance online where the Guardian newspaper said they'd approached Northumbrian Water and had received no comment on legal proceedings against the water company for illegal overflows.

Is there anything you can tell me about this now in terms of not talking to the media about problems and not being transparent about these things, which are clearly illegal.



**Richard Warneford:** There is quite a bit to unpack in that, but the first thing to say is then our storm overflows and discharges are operating in line with their consent. So, they are operating legally.

There is an investigation that is ongoing into lots of water companies at the moment and actually that is a matter of legal process. We had a very small number of issues. There were three or four issues, there were minor and there were resolved really quickly. We were thanked by Ofwat as part of their investigation for being very transparent with that. They specifically made that comment. We're expecting the overall investigation to conclude very soon. As I say we have very few minor issues that were resolved really quickly, and none of which caused any environmental issues at all.

Regarding the general issue of Storm overflow operation, as I said, they're operating in line with their permits. What you're seeing is because of the big investment needed is that actually there's sort of a change in what expectations are from the public, from government. There are different targets and that is what that will drive investment. It'll drive a reduction in the overflows and spills. It'll probably drive a change in permits from the Environment Agency. But it's absolutely not the position where we're standing here with lots of illegal overflows.

**Question 25:** <Name> says other water companies have talked about a tariff trial in which customers will be charged less for a smaller block of water. But as usage increases, so does the unit price. Is this something that Northumbrian and Essex and Suffolk Water intend to trial? And if so, when and for how many households?

**Mark Wilkinson:** We have had quite strict charging rules up until this year and Ofwat have allowed us to do some more, I guess, innovative trials on different tariffs for people. There are a number of trials that have just started. There will be more next year, and we intend to have a trial ourselves next year. We are just trying to work out what the right sort of tariff options might be to incentivise the right behaviour for saving water. We're looking at a trial for our smart metered customers.

We've been putting smart meters in an area in Dagenham and that gives us a lot more data. We're going to start a trial next year in that area in Dagenham where we'll look at trying to incentivise people to use an efficient amount of water. We've got some targets of water usage. We're going to try and encourage people to effectively have a lower bill if they use water within that efficient per household number.

If they go above that, yes, we expect the unit rate to go up. We're just looking at what the right balance of that is now because we don't want people to be massively constrained and adversely impacted by that. We need to need to make sure that balance of the price and the block is right. But something very similar to what you highlighted, it's just a slightly different model. These trials will be going on for the next couple of years in various water companies.

We will then probably extend those things further - one of the things we've been encouraged to do is to share the information about those trials across different companies. We'll try and do slightly different things to work out what might work and what might not. We'll learn from other companies through that. That's a big part doing this in that we need to make sure we all look across companies and make sure that we find the right outcome.

**Question 26a:** I am from Fencehouses near Sunderland, so yeah, I mean I've got the e-mail recently about this link but nothing else has ever come through from Northumbrian Water. So, I'd like to know where all the communications are? Where do I find it?

**Kevin Johnson:** Very good question. Heidi, I think one for you – it goes back to a point we've touched on a couple of times before. Are you engaging, are you communicating well enough using modern channels and ways in which people are going to hear from you and is it going to be engagement rather than just pushing out bills etcetera? What's going to happen with that in the next five years?

**Heidi Mottram:** I'm assuming that because she's made it onto tonight, she's probably somebody who's online. So, we have social communities and media channels – we're on Instagram, on Facebook, on LinkedIn, on X,

as it's now called Twitter as it used to be called. You can follow us on any of those and talk to us on any of those. We have a WhatsApp channel you can access through our website. You can see that there and also directly communicate with us on our website.

We have lots of different ways. If any customer on here wants to understand how best to communicate with us, perhaps we can follow up with some more information. But we are across every social media channel that you might be on, and our website is very easy to use. So hopefully that's helpful.

**Question 26b:** Can I just come back on that well? So, what if you know what if you're not on Instagram, you're not on LinkedIn? I'm not. I don't want to be on those sites. So how are you going to communicate with me? I'd like a letter, please. If you put all that information on those sites, then send me a letter please.

**Heidi Mottram:** We will try to communicate with our customers using their channel of choice, where they have told us what that is.

We'll make contact with you outside of this and we'll follow up on that. *Unfortunately, we have been unable to do this as we do not have confirmed contact details for this customer.*

**Question 27:** <Name's> question is since the installation of my domestic water meter, I have noticed that my sewerage charges are based on 100% of the water usage. This assumption is clearly incorrect. A typical household depending on the number of occupants will consume volumes of water which are not returned to the sewerage system. I would suggest that sewerage charges are estimated at between 90% and 95% of the metered water usage. Will you please review this and alter your charging policy accordingly?

**Mark Wilkinson:** Different companies do this in different ways. We don't assume 100% of your water goes back through. We actually make an adjustment in the overall charge. So, when we calculate the charge to generate the amount of money we need to, we actually take 5% off that. So, whilst it looks like you're being charged for 100% of the sewerage, it's actually in the mechanism. I can supply you a bit more information about that if you want. Some companies do it different ways. There are some companies that will show 100% charge and then knock 5% off it in the unit. I can give you a little bit of an explanation about that if you want to put your details in. But we do only charge you for 95% of the water that goes through the meter.

**Question 27a:** I've worked with the Environment Agency all over the country, building their sites that activate if they have a pollution and I think you have something in, well I know you do because I built it. But we have something in Newcastle that monitors your water supply and everything else. And we have cameras everywhere else, and I just think that there's some things, Heidi, that this one's for you. There's a lot of things that we find coming over the top of your water system when it's floods and everything like that, that it's just not good.

**Kevin Johnson:** Heidi, were you able to hear enough of <name's> question now to be able to respond?

**Heidi Mottram:** I think we were all struggling a little bit to hear, but I'll do my best. I think what you were doing was commenting on your involvement in various systems around the country and I think your question came back to things that might come out of the system during a spill. Richard might want to come in after me, but basically all our storm overflows have screens on them. So, and they're intended to stop that happening, so they have a kind of filter system.

**Question 27b:** Sorry Heidi, can I just apologise and interrupt you. You have screens, but the screens aren't big enough to convey other stuff to, settlement tanks or anything like that. So instead of giving 20 billion or 170 billion to Chinese government just build something to stop it.

**Heidi Mottram:** We have explained that our investors do plan to spend a billion pounds on fixing this. But the screens are actually effective if there is really severe water then sometimes things can force their way through. But we do have screens on them all and the money that we spend is the answer to this and we're starting, our

shareholders have given us money in advance to start next year. We already, as we mentioned, have the lowest bills in the country. We are on this, and we will improve this quickly.

## 5. CLOSE OF SESSION

Kevin Johnson closed the session covering the following:

- A reminder that all questions submitted during the YWYS session or in advance, would be shared with Northumbrian Water, and responses provided. CCW will facilitate that process.
- Additional questions could be submitted within 24 working hours of the YWYS session via CCW. He determined that deadline as 10.00am on Monday 13 November 2023.
- Northumbrian Water will publish the presentation on their website.
- A written record of the meeting will be available on Northumbrian Water's website within 21 working days.
- CCW will also submit its own summary of the key discussion points to Ofwat, who will consider it as part of the PR24 process.
- For Essex & Suffolk Water customers – Anglian Water's YWYS session takes place at 6.00pm on 28 November.
- For Essex & Suffolk Water customers – Thames Water's YWYS session will be held at 5.00pm on 30 November.
- Ofwat is also running a survey. **The link for that is on the screen now together with a QR code.** Please complete it within two weeks.
- Ofwat will be running its own YWYS sessions in the middle of next year that will give an opportunity to test what the draft determinations are, what has been allowed in the investment plans and pricing controls. Ofwat share details of with everyone who was on this call so they can sign up to it.
- Thanking colleagues across CCW, Ofwat and, of course, Northumbrian Water Limited for staging this your water, your say session.

## 6. QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE, AFTER THE SESSION OR IN CHAT NOT ANSWERED

**Question 28:** I have been to reservoirs in France where one corner has been filled with sand to make a beach. It was wonderful to swim without salt or chlorine. Please don't tell me it's for safety reasons. I can walk out to the sea anywhere and swim. I can swim in the blackwater or the crouch. How can it be your fault if someone drowns. Surely there comes a point that it's up to the individual. I could jump in front of a train, but the trains still run. I could go rock climbing and fall, but that's not banned. I could go caving, need I go on.

**Answer 28:** We partner with a number of organisations on different sites, including sailing clubs, which have people who are trained and accredited to manage activities on or in the water. It is only through these organisations that we allow any activities in or on the reservoirs. However, reservoirs are working pieces of engineering, with dangerous currents below what might appear to be a peaceful, flat surface. For that reason, outside of those organised events we have to stick to a simple rule to stay out of the water.

**Question 29:** When is NW going to build new sewage treatment facilities for the hugely increased level of housing in the north of Newcastle?

**Answer 29:** Our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan looks at the predicted growth in demand to make sure we have enough capacity at our treatment works. Where we identify a future increase in capacity is required, we work closely with the Local Planning Authority and Developers to plan our investment ahead of any planned development.

**Question 30:** When is NW going to stop the draining of poisonous effluent from agricultural land also to the north of the city.

**Answer 30:** We do not routinely drain effluent from agricultural land. Wherever possible we prevent surface water run-off from agricultural land getting into our network. Where we are requested to accept effluent from a trader into our network and treatment processes, we undertake an assessment of the proposed discharge and if appropriate will issue a Trade Effluent Agreement which will stipulate the requirements to allow the discharge to take place.

Agricultural run-off is not a trade effluent and is a matter for the Environment Agency.

**Question 31:** Where can I find a up to date copy of the sewerage system for Bellingham, please?

**Answer 31:** We have arranged for a GIS plot of the sewerage system to be sent to the customer.

**Question 32:** Can you please explain how you are going to address the imbalance of offshoring profits away from the UK, whilst simultaneously dumping waste into our waterways and sea at an unacceptable level, due to lack of investment in the infrastructure you inherited from the UK tax payer?

**Answer 32:** There's been huge amounts of money invested since the water industry was privatised. Investment by water companies is 84% higher than it was before the sector was privatised. In England and Wales, water companies have invested £190 billion in making sure things work and carry on working since privatisation in 1989.

The UK invests more on drinking and wastewater infrastructure than any nation in the European Union. We know there's still lots more to do and more investment is going to be needed in the future as we meet higher standards and also replace a huge network of assets.

Dividends are never popular, but they are important because without private investment we would simply not be able to improve services for customers and the environment and every investor will expect a return on the money they put in. Every year we spend more to deliver the service that we collect from customers in their bills – between 10 and 20% more – so we need to borrow money from investors to meet the shortfall.

Please also see answer to Question 56.

**Question 33:** Will you simplify the reporting on the amount of water lost to leaks in your annual report? Previously, four calls and two excel spreadsheets were required. The reporting should include the percentage of Directors' bonuses linked to leak reductions, an 'equivalent measurement' (such as number of Olympic sized swimming pools), a benchmark comparing your reduction in water loss to UK 'best in class' and a target for reduction, ideally in number and graphical formats.

**Answer 33:** We work to make our reporting as clear and understandable as possible. We understand customers concerns on leakage and have set ourselves very stretching targets to reduce leakage by 17.5% in ESW and 15% in NW by the end of this AMP. We already have among the lowest leakage in the country in ESW of 12.8% and so these targets are particularly challenging.

In the last year, we have made significant investments to enable us to achieve our best ever performance in repairing visible leaks – hitting our targets in the South. This has included extra people working on finding and fixing leaks.

We know this is something customers really care about and there is still more to do. The deployment of new technology and additional metering is helping deliver a smart water network that will help us to go further than ever before.

**Question 34:** How much does NW expect our bills to rise over the next few years.

**Answer 34:** This is the largest investment programme in the last 30 years with our shareholders putting in an extra c.£400m, we'll need to borrow more and customers' bills will increase.

In our Essex and Suffolk Water region bills will need to rise to £21.50 per month on average in 2025 increasing over time to £24.50 per month in 2030, excluding inflation. In the North East bills will need to rise to £32.50 per month on average in 2025 increasing over time to £39 per month in 2030, excluding inflation. This follows a significant drop in bills in 2020 and with bills now back to 2019 levels.

We understand any increase in bills won't be welcome at the current time, that is why we have committed c.£170m to support customers who are struggling to pay their bills, four times as much than the last five years. We will also make gradual increases to reduce the impact on bills in line with customer feedback.

**Question 35:** Are NW and the water industry in environmental denial.

**Answer 35:** We understand and share our customers' and communities concerns about the health of our rivers and beaches. It is important to recognise that water companies find themselves in different positions for a variety of reasons. We have invested heavily and worked hard to further demonstrate our track record for protecting and enhancing the environment, with the Northeast having some of the highest standards for bathing water quality, the cleanest rivers, and beaches.

In two of the last three years, we achieved the highest four-star 'leading company' rating for our environmental performance from the Environment Agency and in the third year we achieved a three star 'good company' rating, the second-best result. Our performance has not declined but the standards to achieve have tightened.

**Question 36:** Who decided 2030? Why not 2028? For completion of initial improvements.

**Answer 36:** This aligns with the business planning period which runs from 2025 to 2030.

**Question 37:** Who is charge of NW's environmental fiasco. When are they going to resign.

**Answer 37:** We have worked hard on protecting and enhancing the environment and in two of the last three years we achieved the highest four-star 'leading company' rating for our environmental performance from the Environment Agency and in the third year we achieved a three star 'good company' rating, the second-best result. Our performance has not declined but the standards to achieve have tightened.

In the Northeast, we have some of the lowest levels of pollution and some of the cleanest rivers and beaches in the country. 32 out of 34 of our coastal bathing waters are classified as Excellent or Good and two of our catchments, Northumbrian Rivers and the Solway, have the highest proportion of water bodies by surface area meeting good ecological status in England and Wales.

We know that we need to go further, and this plan represents a ten-fold increase in our levels of investment to better enhance and protect the environment.

**Question 38:** Is it acceptable that our rivers and coast are so polluted. Will those in charge resign.

**Answer 38:** In the Northeast having some of the highest standards for bathing water quality, the cleanest rivers, and lowest levels of pollution in the country. 32 out of 34 of our coastal bathing waters are classified as Excellent or Good and two of our catchments, Northumbrian Rivers and the Solway, have the highest proportion of water bodies by surface area meeting good ecological status in England and Wales.

**Question 39:** Do NW operate a reward for failure culture.

**Answer 39:** Our vision is to be the national leading water and wastewater company in the country and in line with this we have always set ourselves challenging targets to improve our service levels. Our culture is geared to rewarding high performance towards achieving these stretching targets. Our dividend policy provides an explicit link between the dividends we pay and the service we deliver to customers and the environment. Our

pay structure is also linked to achieving these stretching targets, including those for the environment, customer service, water and wastewater services and community activities.

**Question 40:** What does good environmental policy look like. Please don't spin that NW have a good record. When children swim in shit that's bad!

**Answer 40:** In the past, society, policymakers and the water industry itself may not have been as ambitious as we could have been in prioritising environmental improvements, and we are sorry for that. There is a recognition now that we must collectively put that right for the future. We welcome this renewed ambition. The water environment is not only critical to our business, but a major factor in making our communities great places in which to live and work. In the Northeast we will invest c.£1.7bn in an ambitious environmental programme to meet the strict new environmental targets being set by Government and regulators.

This is a ten-fold increase in the size of our environmental investment compared to 2020/25. We want these new investments to dramatically improve the environment by reducing spills and nutrient pollution and increasing biodiversity and amenity benefits. To avoid adding to our carbon footprint, our plan focuses on catchment and nature-based solutions working in partnership wherever we can.

**Question 41:** How much has NW spent on PR to hide bad press and environmental failings.

**Answer 41:** We are open and transparent when communicating with all our stakeholders including the media and have not spent anything on PR to hide bad press or environmental failings.

**Question 42:** Why has no one resigned over NW poor environmental record.

**Answer 42:** We have worked hard on protecting and enhancing the environment and in two of the last three years we achieved the highest four-star 'leading company' rating for our environmental performance from the Environment Agency and in the third year we achieved a three star 'good company' rating, the second best result. Our performance has not declined but the standards to achieve have tightened.

In the Northeast, we have some of the lowest levels of pollution and some of the cleanest rivers and beaches in the country. 32 out of 34 of our coastal bathing waters are classified as Excellent or Good and two of our catchments, Northumbrian Rivers and the Solway, have the highest proportion of water bodies by surface area meeting good ecological status in England and Wales.

**Question 43:** When will our children be able to swim in rivers and the coast, without fear of swimming in excrement.

**Answer 43:** Reducing spills and protecting our bathing waters has been a major focus for us for a long time and we've made £350 million investments over the last ten years to make sure that we have the cleanest bathing waters in the country.

Improvements have meant that we have the lowest duration and improved our average number of spills to 20 from 23 the previous year.

We have 32 out of our 34 bathing waters classified as good or excellent and, for the 2 that aren't, it's clear that the cause is not due to our assets. We'll continue to invest in further improvements in our bathing waters and making that information available to the public. By the end of this year, more information than ever before will be available for people to help them make informed decisions on when and where to swim, and we will have 100% monitoring of our Storm Overflows, helping us to respond more quickly, should there be a problem.

**Question 44:** Is it time to change the structure of the board and make it more customer centric. i.e., replace 50% of directors with customer representatives.

**Answer 44:** Our Board has a good balance of backgrounds, skills, experience and knowledge to enable them to make sound strategic decisions about all aspects of the business. Importantly, the Board includes independent non-executive directors (“INeDs”) with the ability, experience and strength of character to enhance the Board’s effectiveness and to constructively challenge the company’s management and to help develop strategy. The INeDs include individuals with significant experience of customer-facing industries and knowledge of environmental matters.

**Question 45:** A lot of the general public feel the water industry directors have just had their noses in the trough, happy to continue with the status quo, of a lack of investment and continuing environmental ignorance.

**Answer 45:** Stakeholder expectations are changing, and will continue to change, and we must understand and anticipate what our customers want regarding service, resilience and the environment. We have spent the last two years understanding the ambition of our customers, the Government, and other stakeholders on these issues, developing and consulting on how we should play our pivotal role in navigating such challenging times. Our plan reflects our goal to be the national leader in the provision of water and wastewater services, which we remain committed to.

We see the next few years as a step-change: the largest investment programme in the last 30 years. We know we need to transform our organisation to deliver improvements in service levels, help to address wider global environmental challenges, and maintain confidence in us as the most trusted water company in England.

**Question 46:** How much is needed to be spent to sort out the environmental issues over 5, 10, 15, 20-year time frames.

**Answer 46:** We expect a material and lasting step up in the amount of investment required to deliver major improvements to the natural environment. To meet the UK Government Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan requirements and the wider performance objectives of the DWMP, we will need to invest around £1bn extra every five years for the next 25 years. At the same time, to deliver further improvements to the environment investment in line with the 2025-30 environmental programme will be needed, which is considerably larger than for previous periods. If further pollutants are identified as needing to be treated in wastewater, such as microplastics, then this would require a further step-up in investment.

**Question 47:** Who decided the speed of travel of the current plan of works.

**Answer 47:** Over the past two years we have seen a significant expansion of the legal obligations that we need to meet which will drive new investment requirements, around 90% of our enhancement investments are driven by legal requirements.

We have also engaged extensively with customers over the past two years. Given the context we have focused our engagement activities on those aspects of our plan where customers can make genuine choices, like phasing investments to balance legal obligations with affordability.

**Question 48:** How do NW plan on restoring the public’s trust.

**Answer 48:** In Consumer Council for Water’s (CCW) most recent Water Matters Report, Northumbrian Water is the most trusted water and sewerage company in England – and we have remained amongst the most trusted companies in the sector for many years. We are never complacent and continue to challenge ourselves to go further, investing heavily and working hard to further demonstrate our track record for protecting and enhancing the environment, with some of the highest standards for bathing water quality, the cleanest rivers, and the lowest levels of pollution. We acknowledge that we need to move faster on reducing spills to the environment. We understand the scale of transformation that will be required and are determined to deliver our most ambitious plan yet.

We see the next few years as a step-change: the largest investment programme in the last 30 years including significant new shareholder investment of c.£400m and a continued commitment to support our local

communities. We know we need to transform our organisation to deliver improvements in service levels, help to address wider global environmental challenges, and maintain confidence in us as the most trusted water company in England.

**Question 49:** The proposal to enforce water meters is both unfair and unnecessary. The Essex & Suffolk water Business plan indicates that 74% of customers support the proposed business plan. This means 26% do not. 31% of Essex & Suffolk customers in Essex do not have water meters and there is no evidence in the plan that indicates that these customers want or even need water meters. The argument for water meters in the plan in fact doesn't "hold water".

**Answer 49:** We need to ensure that we are consistent in our approach to this change and treat all customers equally. That means that if the government provides us with permission, meters will be installed for all of our domestic properties in Essex and Suffolk.

There will be other customers who are water efficient and may not benefit from seeing their water usage. If those customers move, we need to consider that the next occupier may not have the same water behaviours and therefore a smart meter will be of benefit.

We are aiming to install meters area by area to be as efficient as possible. Returning to a location to install meters after a change in occupation will not be cost effective. We are very conscious of the costs surrounding our business plan and have this in mind when implementing compulsory metering.

Smart meters at individual properties help to build up a bigger picture of water usage in an area which can help pinpoint leaks on our network. They can also help customers identify leaks, such as leaky loos, in their own property. We expect as smart metering grows it will be easier to identify where we are losing water in our network and then focus our resources to the relevant areas.

Being billed on a water meter can prove to be more cost effective for households. To identify how much a metered bill could be for you take a look at our water usage calculator here [Usage calculator \(eswater.co.uk\)](https://www.eswater.co.uk/usage-calculator).

If compulsory metered billing is granted, we recognise this will be a change for 36% of our customers in Essex and Suffolk. We are continuing to develop our plans to ensure our customers receive the relevant support during any potential transition to metered billing. We will provide timely, clear communications if this is the direction agreed upon.

**Question 50:** What are Water Companies doing to stop the sewerage companies polluting our rivers and sea?

**Answer 50:** Much of our system is a combined system dealing with sewage and also rainfall so at times of heavy rainfall the system can become overloaded. Storm Overflows have been designed to work like a pressure valve in the sewage network and are there to protect homes from sewer flooding at these times of heavy rainfall.

Simply eliminating them without mitigation for the extra rainfall we are seeing from climate change would result in waste being forced back into homes and businesses, as well as out through manholes, which clearly isn't acceptable. This is why we are looking at and delivering a wide range of options that address this. For example, we could build in new nature-based solutions to take the rainfall out of the sewer network or slow down the release of heavy rainfall in the system, we can build extra capacity in parts of the network to help to deal with increased levels of rainwater from storms and reduce the number of spills from Storm Overflows. All of this forms part of our [DWMP | Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans \(nwl.co.uk\)](https://www.nwl.co.uk/dwmp).

**Question 51:** I would like to know why my water rates bill is based upon a council tax valuation of my property dating back to the early 1990's. I have a late 1970's 3-bedroom semi-detached house and pay £489 per year fixed water rates. A 1990's 3 bedroom detached house on the same estate pay £290 per year fixed water rates, as the property was built after the council tax valuation was discontinued and has been valued



separately. Both properties do not have metered water. Why can my property not be valued in the same way as newer properties?

**Answer 51:** Where a property does not have a water meter water and sewerage charges are calculated based on the rateable value (RV) of the property. Following the discontinuation of the domestic rating system on 1 April 1990, the Government recognised an acceptable suitable alternative for water and sewerage charges to unmetered domestic properties would be difficult to find and, as a consequence, legislation was enacted allowing the continued use of rateable value as a basis for charges. They were decided by the Valuation Office and can be different for every property. Rateable values were then frozen in 1990 when council tax was introduced and they have stayed the same since. Properties built after 1990 should have a meter fitted as standard, although it is possible there were a small number under construction for which a rating was issued at this time, although this should very much be an exception. It is possible that you would benefit from a water meter for more information and how to apply to have a water meter fitted for free please got to [Should I Get A Water Meter | How To Get A Water Meter \(nwl.co.uk\)](#) or [Should I Get A Water Meter | How To Get A Water Meter \(eswater.co.uk\)](#)

For more information around unmeasured charges Ofwat provide information here [Unmetered customers - Ofwat](#).

**Question 52:** Very concerned with river/ water pollution. How are you intending to solve this serious problem.

**Answer 52:** Much of our system is a combined system dealing with sewage and also rainfall so at times of heavy rainfall the system can become overloaded. Storm Overflows have been designed to work like a pressure valve in the sewage network and are there to protect homes from sewer flooding at these times of heavy rainfall.

Simply eliminating them without mitigation for the extra rainfall we are seeing from climate change would result in waste being forced back into homes and businesses, as well as out through manholes, which clearly isn't acceptable. This is why we are looking at and delivering a wide range of options that address this. For example, we could build in new nature-based solutions to take the rainfall out of the sewer network or slow down the release of heavy rainfall in the system, we can build extra capacity in parts of the network to help to deal with increased levels of rainwater from storms and reduce the number of spills from Storm Overflows. All of this forms part of our Drainage and Wastewater Management plan (DWMP).

**Question 53:** In Redcar, the Zetland Park building and underground pipework has in recent months been very odorous in recent months. This is very evident to me when walking along the stray path along the sea front for some fresh air only to have to breath crap smells between the Zetland Park roundabout and the Stray Cafe.

**Answer 53:** *We have contacted the customer so that we can investigate this issue.*

**Question 54:** There are two roads where you also get this smell emanating around in the air, the first is Lord Street (between the junctions of Muriel Street and France Street) and the other is Thrush Road (between junctions with Fitzwilliam Street and Lawrence Street). As pedestrian it is quite offensive and sickly for this to be happening in the 21st century, drivers probably wouldn't notice.

**Answer 54:** *We have contacted the customer so that we can investigate this issue.*

**Question 55:** Would you explain your ideas of how to stop any incidents of emptying sewage into the sea. This seems to have happened on a few occasions recently.

**Answer 55:** Much of our system is a combined system dealing with sewage and also rainfall so at times of heavy rainfall the system can become overloaded. Storm Overflows have been designed to work like a pressure valve in the sewage network and are there to protect homes from sewer flooding at these times of heavy rainfall.

Simply eliminating them without mitigation for the extra rainfall we are seeing from climate change would result in waste being forced back into homes and businesses, as well as out through manholes, which clearly isn't acceptable. This is why we are looking at and delivering a wide range of options that address this. For example, we could build in new nature-based solutions to take the rainfall out of the sewer network or slow down the release of heavy rainfall in the system, we can build extra capacity in parts of the network to help to deal with increased levels of rainwater from storms and reduce the number of spills from Storm Overflows. All of this forms part of our [DWMP | Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans \(nwl.co.uk\)](https://www.nwl.co.uk/dwmp)

**Question 56:** What pre-tax profit has been made by NWA in the last complete financial year? How much total dividends have been paid to NWA shareholders in the last complete financial year? How much money was borrowed by NWA in the last complete financial year and for what purpose? If the pre-tax profits made by NWA in the last complete financial year were less than the dividends paid to NWA shareholders, how were those shareholder dividends paid? How does the salary and any bonus of the NWA CEO compare with the average salary of the NWA workers (excluding the NWA Board and executives)?

**Answer 56:** One of our business outcomes is to ensure that 'Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors.' We explain each year in our [Annual Performance Report \(nwg.co.uk\)](https://www.nwg.co.uk) how aim to strike this balance.

**Question 57:** As landowners responsible for giving NWA access to our land for repairs/maintenance of NWA structures we find that although NWA give their subcontractors our contact details, they rarely use them. Could this be solved by NWA contacting us directly instead?

**Answer 57:** *We are contacting the customer to discuss how we can improve this.*

**Question 58:** We understand that the UK is the only country in the world with a privatised water industry. As "captive customers" we have no choice of supplier. Does NWA believe it has been living up to its clear responsibility to its paying customers and our environment?

**Answer 58:** There's been huge amounts of money invested since the water industry was privatised. Investment by water companies is 84% higher than it was before the sector was privatised. In England and Wales, by 2020 there had been £180 billion invested in making sure things work and carry on working since privatisation.

The UK invests more on drinking and wastewater infrastructure than any nation in the European Union. We know there's still lots more to do and more investment is going to be needed in the future as we meet higher standards and also replace a huge network of assets.

**Question 59:** In what order does NWA put its shareholders, board, employees, customers, the environment, its infrastructure maintenance?

**Answer 59:** We have always been an ethical business but we redefined Our Purpose in 2021 by engaging with employees, customers, stakeholders and our Board to develop a relevant, enduring and shared understanding of why our company exists. Our purpose is caring for the essential needs of our communities and environment, now and for generations to come. We do this by providing reliable and affordable water and wastewater services for our customers. It is well understood throughout our business, with our dedicated colleagues committed to delivering for our customers, communities, and environment every day. It guides us every day in balancing and meeting our priorities.

**Question 60:** In their forward plan NWA state that Northeast bills are the lowest in England & need to rise to £33.30/month for 2025/2026 to £38.70/month 2029/2030; an 18% increase excluding inflation; it does not state whether this is metered or unmetered. We ask because we understand as water meter users, we should have lower charges than unmetered customers, but we already pay £31/month even though we use water very carefully in the house and have 6 water butts for gardening. How do NWA's projections work?

**Answer 60:** The bills quoted are an average of metered and unmetered bills. We have not forecast separate metered or unmetered bills at this stage as these depend upon the demand balance between the two sets of customers which is updated annually. Specific customer metered bills depend upon consumption.

**Question 61:** We question NWA's statement that it will keep offering some of the cleanest bathing and will further improve Northeast beaches when we have heard so much about sea life problems at Saltburn-by-the-Sea over the last couple of years.

**Answer 61:**

Overall, the latest bathing water classifications are positive for the Tees Valley coast, with Redcar Lifeboat Station, Redcar Granville and Marske Sands all rising from Good to Excellent. Seven of the area's nine designated Bathing Waters are now rated Excellent, and all remain in the top two classifications possible.

However, it was disappointing to see Saltburn move into the Good classification. Bathing Waters are rated based on the last four years of sampling by the Environment Agency at each location. While we know those who live at and enjoy visiting Saltburn will share our disappointment, it's important to note that a single anomalous high sample in 2021 has stopped this being an Excellent rating in the latest classifications, so people can still be assured this is a great place to enjoy our region's coastline.

We have continued to monitor our assets in the area and have made adjustments and enhancements that have helped to support these improvements in the Tees Valley, building on significant investment in recent years, and we have plans to do even more. We meet regularly with the Environment Agency to discuss all of the North East's designated Bathing Water and will continue to work with partners and the local community to maintain and improve these standards.

We are committed to playing our part, alongside partners and others whose activities have an impact on bathing water quality, in ensuring such high standards are maintained and improved where possible.

**Question 62:** We hope NWA's promises about investment from shareholders and customers and business transformation will in fact take place; will customers be given regular updates on progress on all these points in the coming years?

**Answer 62:** Every year we prepare a report of our performance against the commitments that we make. Details can be found in our Annual Performance Report. We also report against additional performance in Our Purpose report. For our financial performance, details can be found in our Financial Statements report. All these performance reports can be found on our website – this is a link to the latest versions [Annual Performance Report \(nwg.co.uk\)](https://www.nwg.co.uk/annual-performance-report)

**Question 63:** We also hope NWA will keep its promises on improving its impact on the environment, particularly on eliminating pollution events, reducing wastewater spills by 20%; how exactly does NWA propose to work with communities and how "local" will this be?

**Answer 63:** We already work in partnership with the EA and local authorities to reduce flood risk in our region. We have launched a new catchment partnership with the rivers trust to work with local communities and landowners to deliver environmental improvements. In addition, we offer partnership projects through our Bluespaces programme, Water Rangers initiative, and Just an Hour, where we work with local communities to deliver a wide range of community improvements.

You can find out more on our websites [Northumbrian Water | Supplying Water and Sewerage Services in the North East of England \(nwl.co.uk\)](https://www.nwl.co.uk) and [Essex & Suffolk Water | Supplying Water Services in the South East of England \(eswater.co.uk\)](https://www.eswater.co.uk).

**Question 64:** Customers and affordability: We consider 5% of customers' income too high a limit on spending on water bills, considering other cost of living pressures.

**Answer 64:** We have set our support schemes at 5% of household income after adjusting for housing costs to align with the recommendations made as part of CCW's affordability review <https://www.ccw.org.uk/our-work/affordability-and-vulnerability/affordability-review/affordability-review-recommendations/>. We do understand however that everyone's circumstances are different and we therefore offer additional support to help reduce bills, such as supporting customers to reduce usage with help around water efficiency. Whilst the 5% threshold may seem high, the adjustment for housing costs does mean that significant numbers of customers will qualify and we expect to be supporting 400,000 households by 2030.

**Question 65:** "The monitoring of sewage pollution has hugely improved in the last couple of years thanks to the hard work of campaigning. But we still don't have a full picture of monitoring all around the county. And the info we do have is complicated and is largely not available in real time. So, my question is - When will 100% of all sewage discharges be monitored, including emergency overflow pipes and treated sewage, so we know the full-scale impact? And can we get full access to this data? And finally, do you have plans to start monitoring the impacts of your overflows on the health of our rivers and sea and those who use them?"

**Answer 65:** Many of our sewers carry a combination of wastewater from homes and businesses, and rainwater. At times of heavy rainfall, this can mean that the pipes can reach full capacity. The risk from this is that this combination of rainwater, wastewater and other items flushed into the network can be forced back into customers' homes. Therefore, storm overflows (SOs) act as a relief valve, releasing this heavily diluted mix – mostly rainwater – to the environment and protecting homes from sewer flooding. The Environment Agency permits how and when we can use SOs.

We are currently working towards targets outlined in the Government's Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan. In May we published our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan. The plan looks at reducing discharges and protecting the environment, prioritising Storm Overflows and reflecting the effects of the changing climate upon our network.

In 2022 we saw reductions of around 20% in spills per overflow and 40% in the average duration of spills. The results also show an increase in the number of overflows that didn't spill or spilled fewer than 20 times, as well as greater visibility through monitoring. While this is, in part, the result of the weather and a year with fewer intense storms, it also reflects our investment and focus in this area.

Although the 2022 results show notable improvements, and in our region, data shows that we are performing better than the water sector as a whole, we know there is still more to do. We are continuing to work hard to improve, with investment of more than £80 million towards reducing our reliance on and use of storm overflows between 2020 and 2025.

In our plans for the next AMP, we will invest almost £1bn to reduce the use of storm overflows. Improvements will be a combination of building storage tanks and green infrastructure - a more natural way of returning rainwater to the environment such as by directing surface water to ponds and swales.

We will have 100% monitoring coverage of all storm overflows by the end of 2023. We plan to publish storm overflow discharge data in near real time from the beginning of 2024.

Emergency overflows will begin to be monitored in 2025-2030 and should be complete by 2035 in line with regulatory guidance.

There are currently no plans to monitor treated wastewater discharges, other than the annual flow report already reported to the Environment Agency. There are plans to install water quality monitors in water bodies between 2025 and 2035. This data will also be reported publicly although the regulatory guidance for this work is still in development.

**Question 66:** Myself and many North Tyneside locals are concerned about the continued pollution in Cullercoats Bay. You have previously stated that you don't believe NW is at fault but will investigate. What has happened within this investigation?

**Answer 66:** Since 2017, we have led an investigation, alongside the Environment Agency and North Tyneside Council, into the reasons behind the water issues at Cullercoats. During this time, we have made improvements to our network and also to local authority assets. The investigations have shown no evidence of our assets being a primary cause for the deterioration in bathing water quality. Contaminated groundwater is likely to be that primary cause and at the end of 2022 we delivered a project with North Tyneside Council, to divert water from a local authority culvert into our network, to see if that has a positive effect on the water quality.

**Question 67:** What is currently being done about the constant pollution into Cullercoats Bay? What more can be done by Northumbrian water to make the water/beach safer for beach users/swimmers?

**Answer 67:** Please see answer to Question 66 above.

In the Northeast, we have some of the lowest levels of pollution and some of the cleanest rivers and beaches in the country. 32 out of 34 of our coastal bathing waters are classified as Excellent or Good and two of our catchments, Northumbrian Rivers and the Solway, have the highest proportion of water bodies by surface area meeting good ecological status in England and Wales.

We know that we need to go further, and this plan represents a ten-fold increase in our levels of investment to better enhance and protect the environment.

**Question 68:** Specific problem treatment stations on the Tyne. You mention you have to address overflow reduction by law but does this mean stopping routine has a lower priority? Colwell, Allendale and Bellingham Sewage Treatment Works were the highest polluting sewage assets in the NE in 2022 (latest data I can find). Is anything being done about sorting these treatment works now?

**Answer 68:** We are currently working towards targets outlined in the Government's Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan. In May we published our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan. The plan looks at reducing discharges and protecting the environment, prioritising Storm Overflows and reflecting the effects of the changing climate upon our network.

The treatment works comply with their permits. Investment will be prioritised in line with the prioritisation criteria that is set out for us.

**Question 69:** Anaerobic Digestion Could anaerobic digestion play a role in helping to reduce sewage spillage?

**Answer 69:** Anaerobic Digestion is not a process used for treating sewage, it is a process we use to treat and recover energy from the sludge by product we generate as part of sewage treatment processes.

**Question 70:** The river Lyne in Northumberland is the responsibility of the Environmental Agency, not NW, however the EA state in recent communications that they have no plans for climate impact which is affecting the river to the point that it was no longer flowing (summer of 2022). They state the incident was not reported at the time! As NW under permit will continue to discharge into the dry river can NW explain what they intend to do to prevent future effluent pooling into the river Lyne Northumberland? A pool of effluent is unacceptable. This issue will impact in the near future all water authorities who discharge under permit into rivers. Dry riverbeds cannot 'flow away' effluent discharges.

**Answer 70:** This is a known issue with flows in the watercourse going stagnant. There have been a number of meetings involving the Environment Agency. Northumbrian Water are not the cause of the issue.

**Question 71:** Also, I would like to know it will it be safe to swim in the sea where I live as I believe there are many sewage discharges nearby? I suffer with an over active neuro immune system disorder (disability) Being able to enjoy the sea is one of a very few things left for people to enjoy that costs little than a bus fare for many who cannot afford far flung holidays to swim in the sea elsewhere, so how can we find out if it's safe to swim in?

**Answer 71:** NWL publish storm overflow discharges to bathing waters on our website and also via the Surfers Against Sewage app. This lets interested parties know when a discharge has occurred at a bathing water location to help them make an informed choice. It is important to recognise that bathing water quality is impacted by many factors beyond those connected to water company assets.

**Question 72:** What type of infrastructure is in place for surface water flooding as this becomes a growing concern? Already in my street I am inches away from having to use sandbags in front of my front door when rain is torrential as it has been at least 3/4 times this year during summer and winter. I am worried as this will only get more severe with climate change impacting more people. What kind of drainage systems are in place ready to deal with this rise in surface water, particularly where neighbourhoods have a lot of concrete and not enough drainage solutions around their property?

**Answer 72:** Surface water flooding can be a complex issue and may sometimes be the responsibility of NWL through our drainage systems, and sometimes the responsibility of the local authority through their drainage systems of highway drainage systems. We work in partnership with the local authority to identify areas at risk of flooding today, and as a result of climate change in the future. Where flood risk is identified we develop collaborative projects to reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses.

**Question 73:** What specific improvements are you proposing to actually achieve what you are now promising?

**Answer 73:** We are currently working towards targets outlined in the Government's Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan. In May we published our [DWMP | Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans \(nwl.co.uk\)](#) which includes the interventions included in our plans between 2025 and 2050. (Add link)

The plan looks at reducing discharges and protecting the environment, prioritising Storm Overflows in line with Government guidance and reflecting the effects of the changing climate upon our network.

In our plans for the next AMP (2025 – 2030) we will invest almost £1bn to reduce the use of storm overflows. Improvements will be a combination of building storage tanks and green infrastructure - a more natural way of returning rainwater to the environment such as by directing surface water to ponds and swales. As we now move to planning the delivery of our interventions, subject to Ofwat approval, we will develop more detailed proposals with a more specific delivery programme across 2025 – 2030.