

WONDERFUL ON TAP

SEVERN

TRENT

# SEVERN TRENT

## VULNERABILITY STRATEGY

How we're supporting customers who need extra help.



# WELCOME



Welcome to Severn Trent's first Customer Vulnerability Strategy.

At Severn Trent we are proud to supply one of life's essentials to over 8 million people across our region. In doing this, we recognise that many customers will need extra support at some point in their lives. This strategy outlines how we will deliver better outcomes for all customers, including those in vulnerable situations.

Whether it's eradicating water poverty, helping people in crisis, or spreading the word on the support that's available, we're proud of the positive progress we've made so far. And in the places where our customers live, we're working with local partners to make it easier for people to access the help they need.

This strategy is just a beginning. It sets out the areas we are going to focus on in the years to come, and how we'll deliver these plans by 2030.



Jude Burditt  
Customer Solutions Director

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## HOW DO WE DEFINE VULNERABILITY AT SEVERN TRENT?

Many people might not consider themselves as being vulnerable. However, the sad truth is that vulnerability comes in many different forms and can affect anyone at various times in their lives. It can be short-term, long-term, or permanent and can affect physical health, mental wellbeing, the ability to communicate or manage finances.

At its simplest, being vulnerable or needing extra help could mean some people need support just to access our services. This could be because of a serious illness or other physical condition, recent life event or communication challenges. Our Priority Services Register, to which nearly 390,000 customers have signed up, makes sure we can identify and support these customers whenever they need it.

For some customers, cost of living pressures - such as energy costs, food inflation, rent or mortgage increases - could mean they are struggling financially.

In 2024 we are already supporting more than 259,000 through our tailored support schemes, however we want to go further. We aim to eradicate water poverty across our region by 2030, meaning no-one will spend more than 5% of their disposable income on water bills.

Regardless of the vulnerability, we want our customers to know about the extra help we have available and how to access it when they need it. Our strategy document shows the various ways we can help to make life easier for those who need extra help.

But we will go further, by collaborating with partners in communities local to our customers. We believe that by using local community-based experts we can help people to recognise their needs, understand what help is available and get the support they need, when they need it.

## ABOUT US

As one of Britain's largest water companies, we impact the lives of millions of people across the Midlands, from the outskirts of Sheffield, down to Bristol.

### What we do

We provide over eight million people across our region with fresh, clean drinking water every day - that's about two billion litres. And when they've finished with it, we take it away again and clean and treat it before returning it safely to the environment.

### Affordable bills

To make sure that our customers can continue to enjoy our product for years to come we're investing more than £6bn between 2020 and 2025 on new and existing assets like pipes, treatment works and reservoirs. We do all of this while currently continuing to offer one of the lowest average combined bills in the country, at around £1.20 per day.



## DOING THE RIGHT THING

We pride ourselves on doing the right thing for our customers, and for the communities where we live and work.

We help tens of thousands of customers with additional tailored support, through money off bills or by supplying devices so they can become more water efficient.

In 2020 we launched our Community Fund to provide grants to groups and organisations across the Midlands for the projects that are so close to their hearts. Since then we've given away £8m, plus an additional £1.6m to help our communities deal with the impact of the pandemic, helping to make a tangible difference in our communities.

We won't stop there; over the next five years, we've committed to increase funding to our community fund and we'll significantly increase the number of vulnerable customers we support to ensure that they never need to worry about their water supply.

To make sure we never stop focusing on improving the support we provide, we regularly discuss our plans at Severn Trent. Our Customer Solutions Director holds responsibility within our Severn Trent Executive team; however, we manage our plans, and the progress of them in our Corporate Sustainability Committee. This committee includes representatives across the business, including Severn Trent Board members. As well as regular reporting, we update the Committee on the progress of our plans annually.



# 1. OUR CUSTOMERS AND PRIORITIES

We're keen to know what matters to our customers. Whether that's by meeting them face-to-face, We've worked hard to understand what our customer priorities are. Our research with customers has helped us define a set of promises that we are committing to:

## Reliable supplies –

keeping interruptions, low pressure, and blockages to a minimum. Being kept informed of what is happening during incidents and providing clear and accurate timescales for resolutions.

## Receiving the help when needed –

during emergencies, throughout and after incidents and when struggling physically or financially.

## Being convenient and easy to talk to –

having an inclusive range of contact channels and deliver a high-quality customer experience when I need to contact you.

# 2. OUR PROMISES

We've worked hard to understand what our customer priorities are. Our research with customers has helped us define a set of promises that we are committing to:

## Provide services that meet our customers' needs:

Our Priority Services Register allows us to tailor our support to customers situations and needs. We promise to find ways to make our services accessible and keep customers informed during periods of service interruptions.

## Supporting our customers now and in the future:

Through financial assistance schemes and smart metering to make bills more affordable.

## Make it easy to access support:

Proactively identifying customers who may need extra help by working in partnership in our communities. Developing a single application for all schemes making it easy to access extra help.

## Holistic support for our communities:

Investment in the communities we serve to create opportunities for employment and life skills to boost income.

## Be easy to talk to:

We offer different channels to suit customers communication needs and our dedicated Care and Assistance team are skilled to provide the extra help that may be needed at times. We also have a team of partnership specialists embedded across our communities to help increase awareness.

## Offer affordable and fair bills:

Our customers benefit from the second lowest bills in England and we continually strive to eliminate water poverty through our range of bill reduction schemes.



## 3. OUR SUPPORT

Whether it is help with understanding our bills, making sure we know how to support customers during a water supply interruption, or finding the right solution to help customers pay what they can afford, we're here to help.

Like us, we know our customers are all different and have needs that change from time to time. This is why it is important that we are flexible for our customers and our Priority Services Register helps us understand individual needs.

Once registered for Priority Services we will ensure that customers know exactly what extra help they can expect and the services they will receive through their preferred contact channel, including a welcome letter so they are clear they are benefitting from the Priority Services. We will also let them know our contact details should they need us. We will contact customers at least every two years to check in and make sure their situation hasn't changed, so we can keep up to date with their needs.

We know that people may need extra help at any point in their life. Sometimes this can be temporary, for example if a customer is recovering from an operation, an expectant mum with a new addition to the family on the way, or have a longer-term need, such as a health condition or other disability. When we are made aware of a customer's circumstances, we will also capture individual customer needs as long as we receive consent from them, for example if a customer is visually impaired and can only read off yellow paper, we will capture this need in its entirety ensuring any extra support is tailored and completely individual.

Here are just a few examples of where we can provide extra help. We want customers to let us know if any of these apply to them, or someone else in their household:

### Has a mental health condition that impacts the ability to deal with day-to-day tasks or leaving the house:

By knowing this information, we can have better conversations with customers through awareness of their circumstances.

#### We promise to:

- Recognise when to signpost customers to our extra help schemes and other trusted organisations and charities.
- Case-manage customers for short periods of time to assist during difficult periods, we know sometimes customers prefer to have one dedicated contact during difficult periods.
- Provide all our customer facing staff with mental health training and awareness, including having dedicated mental health first aiders for our employees.
- Support mental health awareness campaigns each year.
- Offer a range of tailored support to their needs.
- Provide customers suffering with mental health the ability to use our nominee scheme to allow someone else to speak to us on their behalf when needed for as long as it is needed, more information on our nominee scheme can be found on page 15.

### Our commitments

Double the number of data sharing agreements held with external third parties to 25 by 2030.

Invest £10 million to our Community Fund by 2030. Helping to make a real tangible difference in our communities.

Host annual community events across our region to reach minority groups and customers requiring extra help.

Achieve a PSR reach target of 11% of HH connections by 2030 whilst also playing an active role in phase two of the Energy/Water data share project and the Government's proposed Shared Once Support Register (SOSR).

Provide bill reductions for up to 512,000 customers with our Big Difference social tariff and Watersure schemes by 2030, higher than the number of customers we forecast to be in water poverty in 2029/30.

A decade long commitment to help up to 100,000 people through free employability training in communities and work experience for schools.

### Our aims

Introduce video relay service or similar to assist customers with communication needs through British Sign Language.

Undertake ISO 22458 inclusive design and consumer vulnerability once our Kraken migration is complete.

Continue to increase the awareness of our affordability schemes and priority services, with the aim to increase this to 45% by 2025.

Deliver a single application for all schemes to make sure customers find asking for help easier.

We have shared how we are meeting Ofwat's minimum expectations as part of the 'Service for All' guidelines on our website. If you'd like to read about what we've committed to please visit [stwater.co.uk/my-account/help-when-you-need-it/](https://stwater.co.uk/my-account/help-when-you-need-it/)

**Has issues with sight or are partially blind:**

In the UK, more than two million people are living with sight loss, and over 340,000 are registered blind or partially sighted. Awareness of how we can support customers with sight issues is key to ensuring all customers receive the extra help they need.

**We promise to:**

- Provide bills and other communications in many different formats, including paperless billing, larger print, braille, audio, and we offer an over the phone bill read service, more information on our communications can be found on page 32.

- Ensure when supply interruptions take place that we communicate through their preferred communication type.
- Provide customers with sight issues the ability to use our nominee scheme to allow someone else to speak to us on their behalf.
- Ensure our website is accessible, and we offer the 'Recite Me' tool which lets customers customise our website to their needs.
- Give customers the option to set up a doorstep password with us if we ever need to visit their property to ensure they know our field staff are genuine.

**Has a hearing impairment, deafness, or speech difficulties:**

It is estimated hearing loss affects 11 million people in the UK which is approximately one in three adults. We know that customers who have hearing or speech difficulties are less likely to pick up the phone to communicate with us. We want to ensure our services are accessible for all customers and offer a wide range of ways a customer can communicate with us with seven different channels.

**We promise to:**

- Ensure that communicating with us is as easy as possible, and we offer many difference channels such as:
  - Webchat
  - Social Media

- Face to Face support
- Email or letter writing.
- Provide customers with hearing or speech difficulties the ability to use our nominee scheme to allow someone else to speak to us on their behalf.
- Tailor our communication during all emergency incidents to suit the needs of the customer.
- Ensure our field teams use the 'Knock and Wait' scheme, allowing more time for customers to answer the door.
- Include subtitles on our customer help and educational videos across our website and social media channels.

**Requires connection to a water supply for medical treatment or chronic illness, such as Dialysis:**

1 in 10 people have chronic kidney disease (CKD) and across the midlands – that is 260,000 people. We recognise that being diagnosed with chronic kidney disease could mean a huge life change, not only financially but also the level of extra help someone needs as they go through treatment, and to also manage their increased water and energy use can have a significant impact.

**We promise to:**

- Ensure high dependency customers always have a water supply in the event of an emergency.
- Contact customers as soon as possible if we need to turn off their supply for any reason.
- Continue our strong partnership with Kidney Care UK to reach more customers who may need extra help.
- Promote our Watersure Scheme to reduce the cost of excess water usage.
- Celebrate World Kidney Day every year (14 March) to continue to raise awareness of the help available.
- Ensure our partnership specialists are visible in communities, including visiting hospitals to meet those directly impacted with kidney disease to promote what additional help is available from Severn Trent.

**Needs extra support for a limited amount of time due to a life event, such as divorce or bereavement:**

Life events whether big or small can affect us all in different ways. We understand it is important to recognise when someone might need extra help, even if it's for a short period of time.

**We promise to:**

- Provide tailored support for customers experiencing any kind of life event.
- Signpost customers to other organisations and charities to help and support in these circumstances.
- Ensure we have mental health first aiders available to our own employees as we recognise conversations with customers about grief and bereavement can be upsetting.
- Provide all our customer facing staff with dedicated grief and bereavement training.
- Offer different communication channels including the use of Life Ledger.



### Has mobility or restricted movement or recovering from an operation:

Mobility impairments can range, and regardless of the impairment whether it be upper or lower body, requiring the use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs we want to ensure all customers have the support they need.

#### We promise to:

- Ensure bottled water deliveries are arranged in the event of a supply incident.
- Give customers the option to set up a doorstep password with us if we ever need to visit their property to ensure they know our field staff are genuine.
- Ensure our field teams use the 'Knock and Wait' scheme, allowing more time for customers to answer the door.
- Provide tailored communications in the event of an emergency ensuring we get to the most vulnerable customers first.
- Offer to relocate water meters to a more accessible location if its required.
- Ensure that our offices and visitors' sites are wheelchair accessible.
- Offer financial support through our affordability schemes if you are recovering from an operation which has put you out of work for a while.

### Is of Pensionable age:

Over ten million people in the UK are currently aged 65 and over, and whilst we recognise not everyone over the age of 65 needs additional help, we know it can make life a little more challenging.

#### We promise to

- Provide access to our dedicated Care and Assistance team to provide any extra help needed.
- Provide all our customer facing staff with dedicated training on how to recognise customers over the age of 65 that may need extra support.
- Let customers know about our nominee scheme to allow someone else to speak to us on their behalf.
- Ensure customers are aware of the best affordability schemes for them, particularly through retirement.
- Give customers the option to set up a doorstep password with us if we ever need to visit their property to ensure they know our field staff are genuine.



### Has a Neurodevelopmental condition:

Around 1 in 6 people in the UK have a neurodiverse condition, this may affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with other people.

#### We promise to:

- Provide access to our dedicated Care and Assistance team to provide any extra help needed, we recognise that customers with a neurological condition can benefit from having one dedicated point of contact.
- Ensure bottled water deliveries are arranged in the event of a supply incident.
- Provide many different communication channels such as SMS, Two-way messaging or digital communication via email.

- Offer a nominee scheme where a nominated speaker can be added to an account as a representative.
- Provide communications in clear, jargon free and plain English.
- Ensure that neurodiverse customers and colleagues are celebrated, feel valued and supported.
- Sign post customers to, nominees and carers to other organisations and charities that offer extra help.
- Provide a sensory guide at our visitor sites for customers with cognitive disabilities.

### Has any kind of dementia:

It is estimated over 900,000 people in the UK are living with some form of dementia, with this predicted to rise.

#### We promise to:

- Offer a nominee scheme where a nominated speaker can be added to an account as a representative.
- Ensure all of our customer facing teams are trained to recognise signs and have an awareness of different types of dementia.
- Ensure our field teams use the 'Knock and Wait' scheme, allowing more time for customers to answer the door.
- Sign post customers, nominees, and carers on how to set up a lasting power of attorney.
- Provide access to our dedicated Care and Assistance team to give any extra help needed. We recognise that customers living with dementia can benefit from having one dedicated point of contact.
- Ensure bottled water deliveries are arranged in the event of a supply incident.

### Is unable to read, write or communicate:

We're proud to have very diverse region and we know that not everyone is comfortable talking about bills and essential information, particularly if English is not their first language.

#### We promise to

- Offer customers to speak to us in their own language through our translation services.
- To provide alternative bill and communication formats such as larger print, braille, or audio.
- Continue to offer a nominee scheme where a nominated speaker can be added to an account as a representative.
- Provide many different communication channels such as SMS, Two-way messaging or digital communication via email.
- Ensure our website is accessible, and we offer the 'Recite Me' tool which lets customers customise our website to their needs.

**This list is not exhaustive, and we do encourage customers to let us know about any extra help they may need.**

## SUPPORT DURING AN INCIDENT

### What if my water supply is interrupted?

We work 24/7, 365 days of the year to make sure our wonderful water gets to where it's needed. However, all sorts of things can get in our water's way, like burst mains or issues with our network, so things don't always run smoothly. But, whatever happens, we promise to fix it quickly and keep customers informed.

### What we'll do

- **Keep customers updated:** We will put updates about the incident on our website so locals can find out what is happening. We will also send text messages to affected customers where we have their up-to-date contact details.

- **Provide bottled water:** In the unlikely event of a lot of people being without water, we'll set up local bottled water stations. If a customer has an illness or disability, and are signed up to our Priority Services Register, we can get them the help they need.
- **Spotting our team:** Our engineers, support team, and colleagues delivering bottled water will be wearing branded, protective clothing. If customers are worried, they can always check their identity card and if still unsure they can call us to check on **0345 604 1655** so we can confirm their identity. We recommend customers do not use any phone number they give them.

- **Provide compensation:** We understand how frustrating it is if there's an interruption to water or wastewater services, and we'll take responsibility if things go wrong. Our Guaranteed Standard Scheme outlines the length of time we'll take to respond to contacts and incidents, and how much we'll pay if we fail to meet our promises.
- **What if I have an issue with sewer flooding:** We know it can be stressful if sewage floods someone's home. When we're notified about the flooding, we can help work out what caused it. Customers can:
  - Report the problem online
  - Speak to our team on web chat
  - Call us on **0800 085 8033** We're open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We know how important it is for customers to contact us whenever they need us and we operate a 24/7 operational contact centre.

Our friendly customer operations team will help work out what's caused the flooding and what to do about it. We can send someone to investigate whether a public sewer or private drain was the cause. If the flooding is inside the property, we will be out to attend the property within four hours; for anything external (for instance, in a garden), we aim to attend within 12 hours. We will always keep customers updated if timescales change and let them know when we are on our way.

For external sewage clean ups, we'll do what we can to prevent damage to lawns, landscaping, gravel or garden furniture.

This clean up includes removal of water by suction, removal of most solids and fibrous material and the disinfection of affected external hard surface areas.

### Nominee scheme

Some customers might need someone to help them at times, which is where our nominee scheme helps make things easier. If a customer has dementia, suffers from anxiety, or there's anything else that makes managing their account with us difficult, they can appoint a nominee.

We simply ask for them to give us details of a friend, relative or carer who they allow to speak to us on their behalf. We can even send information directly to the nominee if this is preferred so they can help make sure bills are up to date.

If there's a water emergency such as a supply interruption, we will contact the nominee as well as the customer, in case they need any extra support.

### Inclusive and accessible services

We use the Recite Me accessibility software on our websites to provide customers with the tools needed to navigate and access our information. The communication toolbar allows visitors to customise the content into an easy-to-read format in a way that works best for the individual. The translation tool contains over 100 languages as well as tools to assist with visual impairments and learning difficulties such as dyslexia. You can see our contact us table with all our different channels that we have available.



## WE'RE HERE FOR CUSTOMERS

### What if I'm on Priority Services?

If a customer is on our Priority Services register, once we're notified of what has happened, our duty Catchment Lead will be their point of contact. They will make sure the work is prioritised and that our customers get the support they need, depending on their personal circumstances.

### We're here for our customers

Our customers can appoint a nominee when joining the Priority Services Register. We advise customers to make sure they ask their nominee's permission before giving us their details.

If customers would prefer to chat to us, they can give our friendly team a call on **0345 7500 500**.

We very rarely need to enter a customer's property unless it is to fit, read or access the meter but if we ever do our doorstep password scheme helps protect our customers and stay one step ahead.

Customers can simply pick a password that they can ask for from any person who says they work for Severn Trent. When a caller arrives, we can check their identify for them or they'll need to phone our offices to get the password.

### Tailored communication

We offer different types of alternative formats to make bills as clear as possible. Joining our Priority Services Register will provide customers with a bill that suits their needs.

The types of bill we can provide:

- **Large print:** Our standard bills are written using the font Arial in size 16 point. However, if a customer needs larger print, we can arrange this for them.
- **Braille:** If a customer needs their bill in Braille, we can arrange Class 1 and 2 Braille versions.
- **Audio:** If a customer would rather receive an audio bill, we can send the bill on CD or cassette. We can also read a bill out to customers over the phone.
- **Alternative colour paper:** If a customer has dyslexia, it can help having the bill printed on paper that is not white. We're able to print bills on alternative coloured paper if a customer asks.

### Our Community team

We have a dedicated team of coordinators customer specialists whose role is to engage with organisations and communities across our region and increase awareness of our vulnerability assistance schemes and services. We regularly visit foodbanks, community centres and outreach centres to raise awareness of the support we provide and to engage with customers. This allows us to engage with hard-to-reach customers, including family and friends of those who most need help.

We assist customers to apply for our financial support schemes. In cases of acute hardship, we do issue foodbank vouchers so that customers can access emergency food donations.

We aim to create partnership arrangements with organisations such as housing providers and associations, local authorities and charities, to identify customers in financial hardship and passport them straight onto our support schemes. We believe this will help to remove any potential barriers which may have prevented them from accessing support and ensures we are making every effort to spot customers who need our help.

### Awareness and Training

All our Customer Delivery staff have received vulnerable Customer training to help identify when a customer may need extra help.

We have a dedicated Care and Assistance team who have been trained to deal with any specialist customer queries and are always on hand to help with any advice or support relating to our bills or Priority Services. Customers can call the team directly for free on **0800 917 6901** to discuss their situation.

We also recognise that to best service our customers, we need to understand their situation ourselves, which is why we offer Mental Health first Aid training and awareness to all our colleagues and Managers. This content is provided by Mental Health First Aid England, meaning we are up to date with the latest help. We also provide a wide range of courses by our Occupational Health team on subjects such as Diversity and Inclusion – through our “Wonderfully You” workshops, our neurodiversity support for colleagues or our menopause working group.



## Our memberships

We recognise the importance of working with external experts, and utilising their expert knowledge to upskill our teams making sure we are fully equipped to deliver excellent customer service, and service to suit their needs. This awareness and training ensures our teams are better equipped to spot any extra needs. Some of our memberships include:

**Business Disability Forum** – by us signing up to the Business Disability Forum we are playing our part in creating a disability-smart world by linking in with other businesses, disable people and the Government. We can access advice, support and learning from the 500 organisations who have signed up, helping us to improve the experience of our disabled employees, candidates, and customers by removing barriers to inclusion.

**Disability Confident** – this is a government scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions. We are currently at Level 2 ‘Disability Confident Employer’. This ensures we stay up to date with advice and guidance to help those with disabilities.

**Support The Sunflower** – We recognise not all disabilities are visible and living with a disability can make daily life more demanding for many people, but it can be difficult for others to identify, acknowledge or understand the challenges you face. We have introduced sunflower lanyards, pin badges and identifying cards to give our employees that little bit of extra support, but to also embody this across Severn Trent so all employees, whether they are customer facing or not can recognise the importance of hidden disabilities.

## Employability

We are also passionate about the role we play in our communities to help create inclusive employment opportunities to lift customers out of water poverty. Our Societal work commits to support 100,000 people in water poverty or at risk of falling into water poverty.

We are working with partners and community leaders to tackle some of the underlying causes of poverty, by helping job seekers return to work and open doors for those seeking career changes.

We are now a year into delivering our strategy with local partners in East Birmingham, Derby, and Coventry. We have delivered a range of initiatives, such as employability training which includes CV writing skills workshops, mock interviews and mentoring with community groups, secondary schools, and prisons.

The programmes we deliver also enable us to build a stable pipeline of diverse and highly skilled talent, foster sustainable economic growth and empower community members to thrive in the job market.

In 2023 we partnered with Trailblazers, a national charity set up to mentor young people in prison (aged 18-30), with the primary objective of helping to reduce their chances of re-offending. With our focus on the underlying causes of water poverty, by supporting those in or at risk of becoming water poor, we hope to reduce long-term affordability issues and contribute where we can. We believe by helping people on our patch and giving them the tools to improve their job prospects is a step in the right direction.



## SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS WITH THEIR BILL

If a customer is struggling with their bills, it is important that they talk to us.

We want them to feel like they are not alone and that we are there to help. We recognise that it can seem like a scary or uncomfortable conversation, but it is the first step towards getting things sorted. Our dedicated Care and Assistance team will take the time to talk our customers through their options and find ways we can help:

- **Bill Cap scheme WaterSure:** Can help if the income is low and customers use a lot of water due to either a large young family or a medical condition requiring additional water usage. Any condition that a doctor confirms requires extra water would be eligible. If a customer meets the criteria, including being on a water meter, and use our sewerage and water services, we will cap their bill. The bill is capped at our average yearly charge which will change each year. If the meter reading is lower than the capped amount, customers will only pay for the water they have used.
- **Big Difference Scheme:** The scheme is open to every Severn Trent customer, regardless of age, employment status, or whether they receive benefits. Customers do not need to be behind on their bills to apply. Eligibility is based on an assessment of the overall household income and qualifying customers could receive a discount up to 10%-70% off our average charges.
- **Payment Matching:** If a customer is struggling with debt, they may be eligible for debt support through Matching Plus, where we will match their payment each month to help reduce the account balance.
- **Customer Assistance Scheme:** Working in partnership with an independent charity, we are able to assist customers with their holistic financial needs. We can check they are receiving the right income by reviewing their eligibility for benefits or offer debt support if they're struggling to manage debt. We may also be able to help with essential household items such as washing machines.

- **Switching to a water meter:** A water meter measures the amount of water used, so customers will only pay for what they are using. It can also help save water - many customers find that their bills are cheaper after switching to a water meter as they make a conscious effort to use less once they have a meter fitted, meaning it is a benefit for both their pocket and the environment. Using less water means less needs to be heated, so it can also save on energy bills and reduce their carbon footprint.
- **Home water efficiency checks:** We want everyone to enjoy their water – both now and in the future. To help make sure it is readily available to future generations, we're providing free home water efficiency checks where we'll look at their current water use and check for simple leaks on taps, toilets and showers, which they'll repair if possible. They can also fit water saving products such as low-flow showerheads or cistern displacement devices.

### Making payments more manageable

- **Payment breaks:** If customers have short-term financial problems, we recommend they contact us, and we may be able to offer a temporary payment break for 28 days to give them some time to review their circumstances.
- **Water Direct:** If a customer receives certain benefits from the Government, they may be able to pay their water bill through Water Direct, straight from their benefits payment. The Water Direct scheme gives customers peace of mind, knowing that the water bill is taken care of, and they can use the money in their account for something other than paying bills.



## PARTNERSHIPS

We are proud of the many charities, organisations, and other authorities that we partner with to help and support our customers.

### Working with DWP

We data share with DWP to enable us to identify customers in receipt of certain benefits who would be eligible for a bill reduction. This means we can automatically apply a discount to their bill without having to contact us or complete an application process.

### Working with Trusted Partners

To successfully deliver our tailored support services to customers, especially those in diverse and hard to reach areas, we need to work closely in partnership with local organisations.

We are proud of the work we do with external partners across our region to maximise awareness of our extra help and make sure we get the right support to our customers. Through partnership arrangements with

housing providers, local authorities, and charities, we can identify customers in financial hardship and streamline the process so they can access our support schemes more readily. These partnerships can also help remove barriers which may have prevented people from previously accessing support.

We have a team of partnership coordinators active in communities daily, to help customers who may struggle to communicate over the phone or online with us.

We can attend community meetings and events to raise awareness of the support available, deliver talks to organisations so they can help to spread our message to their own clients, or arrange drop-ins or outreach sessions to help customers directly.

Some of the partnerships, other organisations, and charities we work with that can offer help and support to our customers include:



## HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS - BOURNEVILLE VILLAGE TRUST :

We have been working with Bournville Village Trust for several years to support tenants who might be struggling financially or need additional support with utility and other costs. As a registered social landlord, Bournville Village Trust offers a money advice service when a tenant first takes up one of their properties and throughout their tenancy.

Together, we have successfully supported tenants to be able to maintain their tenancies with schemes like our Big Difference Scheme. This means that we can support tenants much earlier, reducing the risk of further affordability challenges. It also enables our teams to be proactive in identifying households who could benefit from support at the start of their tenancy, which has made a real difference to the families living in this area.



## CASE STUDY: KIDNEY CARE UK - TAPPING INTO HELP WITH WATER BILLS.

In partnership with Kidney Care UK, we can help people suffering with chronic kidney disease access our Priority Services Register and save money.

We conduct visits to dialysis units across our region to run drop-in clinics for patients who are receiving dialysis treatment. We can sign up customers to our PSR to ensure we give them a better, more personalised service, as well as being aware of their medical needs. We can also raise awareness of our affordability assistance schemes and help complete applications, if needed. In return, Kidney Care UK have been able to share with us valuable data insight into the volumes of patients in our region suffering from chronic kidney disease.



**Support for Care Leavers:** Our care leavers support was an industry first, offering young adults leaving the care system a bill discount of 70% off our average charges, through our Big Difference Scheme. We currently work with nine local authorities across the region to auto-enrol young adults as they make the move to independent living for the first time, taking away the need for our customers to reach out.

“The Severn Trent ‘Big Difference scheme’ has been an invaluable support to our young people. The scheme has supported our care leavers during the cost-of-living crisis and has helped them access their own tenancies. In Coventry, we have an excellent partnership with Severn Trent” – **Coventry Through Care team.**

## HOW WE SHARE DATA

We know it is important to protect our customers data. Severn Trent takes the security and use of personal data very seriously and is committed to complying with Data Protection laws.

### Priority Service Register

Severn Trent holds data sharing agreements with several Distribution Network Operators including National Grid and SP Energy Networks so we can share information of the needs of our Priority Service customers automatically.

This means customers do not need to tell them separately. By registering with us for the Priority Services Register, they can automatically be added to the PSR of their energy network operator and supplier. We will contact customers at least every two years to check in and make sure their situation has not changed, so we can keep up to date with their needs and ensure we continue to capture any additional extra help needs.

### Bereavement

We know that dealing with the death of a loved one can be a stressful and emotional experience, which is why we partner with Life Ledger bereavement service, to provide a free easy-to-use ‘Tell-us once’ service helping families.

### Credit Reference Agencies

Like many other utilities companies, we share customers’ personal data with, and receive personal data from, Credit Reference Agencies (CRAs). This helps us maintain up-to-date customer records, prevent fraud, and identify customers at risk of falling into debt.

This makes it easier for us to find and help customers who need financial assistance.

This also helps us manage debt levels and, in turn, keep prices lower for all customers.

If a customer pays their bill on time, our sharing data with the CRAs will also positively impact their credit rating. We will share personal information with CRAs for as long as they are a customer of ours. This will include details about settled accounts and any debts not fully repaid on time.

### Managing preferences

We recognise that customers are keen to ensure their data is protected and used in the right way. With the introduction of our partnership with Kraken, customers will have the ability to manage their own preferences when it comes to Data sharing, this will include choosing what information they would like to receive from us in terms of communications and notifications.

Customers will have the ability at any time to opt out of communications that are not deemed as mandatory.



## 4. HOW WE'LL MEASURE OURSELVES

### 1. Help to Pay numbers growth

Between 2025-30 We are proposing a total package of support worth £550 million for our customers who struggle to pay.

By 2030 we will support up to 693,000 households in total, including over 500,000 receiving a reduced bill, making this one of the largest support packages proposed by any water company in the UK.

### 2. Smart meter installs numbers growth

We estimate that low-income customers who switched from an unmetered to a metered bill saved on average £79 last year. Over the next five-year period, we will make installing one million more smart meters a positive experience for our customers, especially low-income customers, so that they can take control of and reduce their bills. The rollout of smart meters also enables us to dramatically reduce the time to detect and fix a customer side leak.

However, we recognise that some customers have concerns about metered bills being potentially more variable than unmetered bills which is why at the same time as fitting meters we will offer advice on how to save water and on how to keep payments stable.

### 3. PSR Numbers growth

We will continue to grow our database of customers who need additional support through our Priority Service Register, through continuous promotion and awareness of the scheme, partnerships, and the extension of data sharing across the utilities and telecoms sectors.

### 4. Community Fund Investment growth

We are also strengthening our Community Fund in the next five-year period. In 2023-24 we awarded over £2m to more than 100 community organisations and projects, and we are committed to a guaranteed minimum of £2m per year until 2030.

### 5. Inclusivity and Reach

Achieving AA-level compliance ensures that Severn Trent's digital services and websites are accessible to a broader audience, including people with disabilities. By adhering to WCAG guidelines, Severn Trent can provide a seamless experience for all users, regardless of their abilities or impairments.

### 6. Customer happiness scores

How do our customers feel when they speak to us when they have a specific need and/or are registered with one of our schemes.

### 7. Complaints regarding Priority Services Register

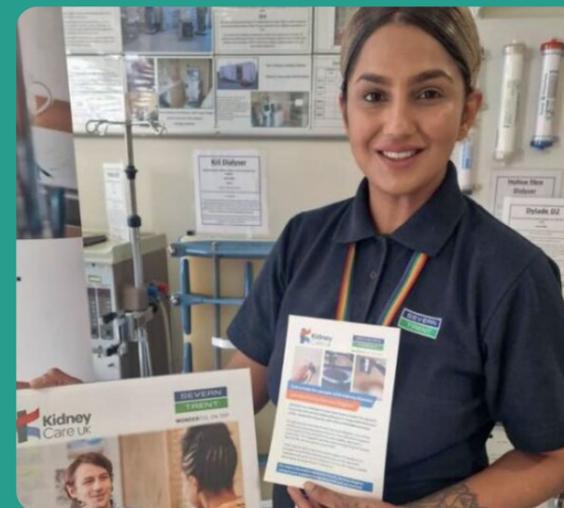
We analyse our complaints performance daily and are committed to identifying trends to ensure we learn from every moment if a customer on the Priority Services register complains.

## 5. HOW WE'VE HELPED OUR CUSTOMERS

Whilst measurement is important, it also matters to us that we are helping our communities. We have some great examples of the difference our support makes.

### CASE STUDY 1:

One of our support partners is Kidney Care UK. As part of the relationship, our community engagement team are able to visit hospitals to meet and better support some of the 260,000 people living with chronic kidney disease (CKD) within the Severn Trent Water supply region. Our partnership is also promoted on the KCUK website, enabling people with CKD to access information about the help available to them through the Priority Services Register and financial hardship schemes. We also featured in the Kidney Matters magazine, distributed to both patients and healthcare professionals.



### CASE STUDY 2:

Our External Relationships team has worked closely with partners and community organisations across Leicester, focusing on customers from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The aim was to break down potential barriers in accessing water support. As a culmination of this project, we hosted a Cost-of-Living event aimed at promoting our range of affordability support and Priority Services Register. We used a translated leaflet to help get our message across. (Figure 2).

गुरुवार 18 मी अप्रैल सवारना 9 थी अपोरना 12

बेलग्रेव सामुदायिक केंद्र, रोथली स्ट, लीसेस्टर एल.ई. 4 6 एल.एफ.

(Belgrave Community Centre, Rothley St, Leicester LE4 6LF)

जो हमें हमारा जीवन-निर्वाह करने में मदद करने के लिए हमें मदद करनी चाहिए।

हमारे विस्तारित परिवारों को उपलब्ध सहयोग विशेष वस्तुआधारित मेजवानी अमास

निःशुल्क टिप्पणियों पर आयो।

नीचे-ना विशेष आधुनिकी मेजवानी:

• वोटर बिल डिस्कॉन्ट • फूड बैंक,

• ओन-थ्रू सलाह • अने भीखु धातु अंधुं

निःशुल्क टिप्पणियों अने डिस्कॉन्ट सहित

गुरुवार 18 अप्रैल प्रातः 9 बजे से दोपहर 12 बजे तक

बेलग्रेव सामुदायिक केंद्र, रोथली स्ट, लीसेस्टर एल.ई. 4 6 एल.एफ.

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यदि आप जीवन-यापन को लागत के बारे में चिंतित हैं, तो हम आपकी मदद

कर सकते हैं। अपने क्षेत्र में परिवारों को उपलब्ध सहायता के बारे में जानने

के लिए हमारे निःशुल्क कार्यक्रम में आएं।

इसके बारे में पता करें:

• पानी के बिल में छूट • खाच कैंद,

• ऊर्जा संबंधी सलाह • और बहुत कुछ

निःशुल्क दोपहर का भोजन और पेय शामिल है

बनारिख 18 अप्रैल ब्रुज जमेरत बोकत सभ 9 बजे से दोपहर 12 बजे तक

बेलग्रेव सामुदायिक केंद्र, रोथली स्ट, लीसेस्टर एल.ई. 4 6 एल.एफ.

(Belgrave Community Centre, Rothley St, Leicester LE4 6LF)

अगर आप अपने खर्चों के बारे में चिंतित हैं तो हमें मदद करने के लिए हमें मदद

कर सकते हैं। अपने क्षेत्र में परिवारों को उपलब्ध सहायता के बारे में जानने

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इसके बारे में पता करें:

• पानी के बिल में छूट • खाच कैंद,

• ऊर्जा संबंधी सलाह • और बहुत कुछ

निःशुल्क दोपहर का भोजन और पेय शामिल है



# 6. CUSTOMER'S VIEWS ABOUT OUR SERVICES – HOW WE ENGAGED TO DEVELOP OUR STRATEGY

As we have built our plans, we've engaged with our customers to understand their priorities and help us improve the support we give. We've carried out three bespoke pieces of research to help shape our plans: Our **'Help when you need it hub' and vulnerability document**.

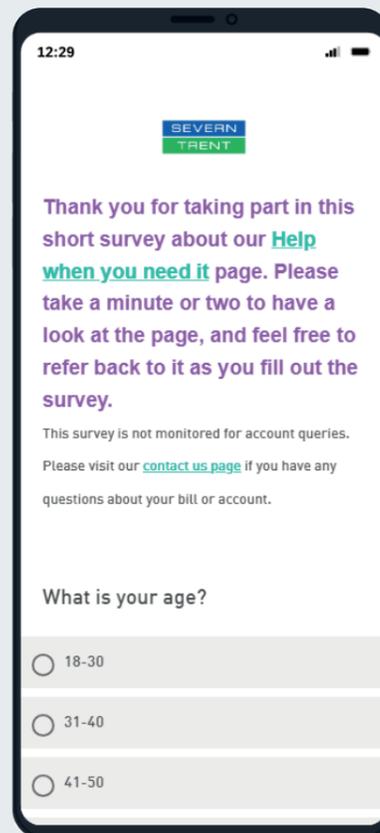
- It is important customers feel the support is accessible. We have built a new hub on stwater.co.uk that puts all the information about what support is available in one place.
- The 'Help when you need it' hub is a customer-facing webpage that acts as a landing page for our support services with links to key support journeys. It is part of our wider vulnerability strategy.
- We have also made our vulnerability document more accessible. We believe we should be transparent with our customers, and show our commitments, so we have created a document that highlights what our promises are.

## Our approach – interviews

- We conducted 1-hour semi-structured interviews with 5 customers from our volunteer database.
- Interviewees were sourced from a research volunteer database.
- Interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams, and participants were invited to share their screen as they worked through the webpages.

## Our approach – survey for our 'Help when you need it hub'.

- We offered our survey respondents one of our three-page designs to review. Interviewees were shown all three pages and asked to provide a preference.
- We received 332 responses from survey – split evenly between three experiences.
- We presented customers with a popup on the 'my account' home. This invited customers to fill in the survey and provide feedback on different website designs.



## Our approach – survey for our vulnerability strategy document

- We shared our customer friendly version of the vulnerability strategy and asked for their thoughts.
- 556 responses from the survey
- We asked how easy the document is to navigate, if the support we offer feels relevant and whether they feel Severn Trent are doing enough to help.



## Our results

<p><b>96%</b></p> <p>of customers felt they had some understanding of the information presented on the 'Help when you need it' hub.</p>	<p><b>87%</b></p> <p>of customers felt our Vulnerability Strategy document was easy to understand</p>	<p><b>96%</b></p> <p>of customers felt the information presented on the 'Help when you need it' hub was useful.</p>	<p><b>83%</b></p> <p>of customers said that our Vulnerability Strategy document was relevant to them</p>	<p><b>73%</b></p> <p>of customers could understand what the next steps would be if they needed extra help.</p>
<p>Customers feel it is important that they know what is happening when there is an incident, across multiple channels.</p>	<p>Customers want to know timelines for resolution. They should be realistic and specific.</p>	<p>Important updates should be clear to make sure they are fully understood and do not cause any confusion—e.g. boil water notices.</p>		

## 7. MORE TO COME - OUR FUTURE COMMITMENTS

### Key messages

Our customer feedback has been hugely helpful to make sure what we offer, and how we offer extra help is accessible to customers. We believe that our customer research can be useful for other things too, so we have included some of the main takeaways below:

- It is important to provide information in digestible steps.
- Offer customers different channels to access support.
- Ensure teams are trained and equipped to provide helpful information.
- Make it clear how to access support and what to expect from us.
- Different versions of information are helpful – i.e. some customers prefer detail, some want the information to be simple.
- Customers want to feel that they are helping their communities, even if they do not need the support themselves.

- Asking for help must be easier.

It is not just the customer research we have carried out recently that has helped shape our plans. We always actively monitor and seek the views of our customers so that we can understand their needs. We have done this in the following ways:

- An independent research agency runs a weekly online representative tracker survey of our customers, with a specific focus on awareness of our range of support schemes for Priority Services and financial support.
- We conducted our largest-ever engagement with customers and stakeholders on affordability for a price review, with 15 research projects in addition to Ofwat's required affordability and acceptability testing and we have reviewed other organizations' research in depth.
- Customer Tracker Vulnerable customer analysis - Sept 2023. Survey responses from over 5,000 customers.
- Our Social Barometer survey takes place twice a year and aims to understand our customers' attitudes to wider societal issues, the environment and investment for the future.
- Usability tests with customers on the content on our ST website.
- We are also part of wider industry groups.

Our membership to the Contact Centre Management Association, Water UK, and Institute of Customer Service ensure we are always evolving through working groups, round tables and best practice visits.

### Growing numbers of customers supported

We recognise and understand that some of our customers are struggling because of the rising everyday costs such as high energy bills, high inflation and more recently increases in rent and mortgage payments. We are proposing a total package of support worth c.£550m over 2025-30 for our customers who struggle to pay. By 2030 we will support up to 693,000 households, or 1.7 million people.

We are also committed to further growth of our Priority Services Register, working alongside Water UK and Energy Networks Association (ENA) on data sharing with the energy sector, ensuring Severn Trent is accessible to all customers.

#### • Kraken – our new customer portal

In 2023, we shared the exciting news that we have entered a partnership with award-winning tech provider, Kraken, which will bring their cutting-edge Utilities system to Severn Trent and most importantly our customers. Kraken will bring the latest technology to our billing and customer operating system, as well as delivering a new Smart Metering platform.

As well as empowering our staff to deliver outstanding customer service, we'll also be creating a new, dedicated team of vulnerability specialists to deliver extra help, when needed.

#### • An easy application

We want more people to benefit from the support we offer which is why we're committed to developing a single, easy application form that can be accessed through direct contact with Severn Trent teams, through our website, and allows partners themselves to support customers via our website.

#### • British Sign Language interpreter / video relay service:

We currently use a third party text phone service for those who are deaf or hard of hearing and, as part of our review for accessibility we are looking into using a Video Relay Service to support customers with communication needs through British Sign Language.

#### • Accreditation

Commitment to undertake ISO 22458 inclusive design and consumer vulnerability once our Kraken migration is complete.



# CONTACT US



## Bills and payments

You can register to manage your account online if you are not already signed up. All you need is your Severn Trent account number.

[stwater.co.uk/login](http://stwater.co.uk/login)



## Connect with our team

Contact our team through messaging.



## Bills, Payments, and Water Meters telephone

**0345 7500 500. Monday to Friday: 8am to 6pm; Most Bank Holidays: 9am to 5pm.**

We have a textphone service to help our customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and the number is **0800 328 1155**.



## Water and Waste services telephone

**0800 783 4444.** Emergencies and supply issues. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



## Emailing us

[Customer.care@severntrent.co.uk](mailto:Customer.care@severntrent.co.uk)



## Writing to us

Severn Trent, PO Box 407,  
Darlington, DL1 9WD



## Numbers we use when we call you back

If you have tried to call us and you're waiting in a queue, you might choose to arrange for us to call you back. If you do, we will ring you from one of these two phone numbers:

- **02477 716585** for anything about your bills or payments
- **02477 716587** for anything **not** related to bills and payments.

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# SEVERN TRENT

## VULNERABILITY STRATEGY

How we're supporting customers who need extra help.

WONDERFUL ON TAP

