United Utilities Water Limited
Haweswater House
Lingley Mere Business Park
Lingley Green Avenue
Great Sankey
Warrington WA5 3LP

Telephone: 01925 237000
unitedutilities.com

Our ref: EIR-774
Date: 15/04/2026
Email: EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your request for environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

Your request:

I would like some information around local sewage discharges.

The first incident that id like to draw your attention to is at Bullclose Beck, near Ellenborough in the North west. The report ive seen suggests that sewage has continuously been discharged into the water for over 75 hours, which is hugely concerning. Are you able to provide an explanation as to what is happening? I am aware that sewage is discharged often due to large amounts of rainfall, but im not sure why that would be happening now.

There are several sewage sites in that area that have been discharging for over 12 hours. Dyan Beck, slightly south in distington, and on the coastline has had a continuous discharged for 204 hours recently. Docker beck, in the lake district, has been discharging for the last 218 hours. Im very concerned that people are going to become sick from swimming in the hot weather, and that our environments are going to be affected by such lengthy sewage discharges. North of kendal has several sites that are discharging into the river within very close proximity. Two sites within very close proximity to pennington flash country park, near wigan, have neen discharging for 104 hours.

Please can you provide information as to why these discharges are occurring and what is being done to reduce the amount of sewage discharge. I am concerned as a member of the public, and as a united utilities customer. Thanks for your help on this matter, I have also contacted Yorkshire water in a similar fashion based on incidents in their county.

Please can you provide information on these specific sites that ive mentioned, as well as your expected amount of sewage discharge per week, compared to the results from the last 7 days (as of 19/03/2026)

Our response:

We understand the concern around storm overflow use and appreciate you taking the time to highlight specific discharges. Having reviewed your request, and our Storm overflow map | United Utilities - Better Rivers, we have managed to identify six storm overflows that we believe you could be referring to. These are:

- Dearham WwTW storm overflow (UUP00627)

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- Common End CSO storm overflow (UUP00528)
- Hayes Castle Farm CSO storm overflow (UUP00924)
- Staveley WwTW storm overflow (UUP01855)
- Westleigh / Etherstone Main Drainage CSO storm overflow (UUP02088)
- Twist Lane / Westleigh Bridge CSO storm overflow (UUP01973)

I have reviewed our EDM data from 1 to 19 March 2026, and can confirm that of the six identified, only two appear to have been discharging. A copy of this data is enclosed in Appendix 1. If these are not the assets you were referring to, or you have concern about specific storm overflows, please could you provide their names, or reference numbers, and we can complete another search for you.

With regards to why these discharges are occurring, when the sewer system is operating normally, sewage leaves our homes and businesses, sometimes mixed with rainwater, and is sent to one of our nearest treatment works. Sewers are typically only 15% full when it is dry.

If an area is hit by really heavy rain, like the kind we have seen in more recent summers, the sewers sometimes become completely full of water, and the sewage starts backing up. If there was no storm overflow in place, this sewage could enter homes and streets, as the wastewater would force its way out of the network of pipes to the surface, often rising up through manhole covers. With a storm overflow in place, the rainwater, mixed with sewage, will rise inside the sewer and eventually enter a separate pipe which runs off the main sewer and flows into a river or the sea.

Under strict conditions, and with the permission of the Environment Agency (EA), water companies like United Utilities are legally allowed to spill excess rainwater and wastewater into the river and sea because it is accepted there is a finite capacity inside sewer pipes. Even if a sewer is completely unobstructed, there could still be times when storm waters completely fill them. After heavy rainfall, groundwater can infiltrate into combined sewers, adding to the amount of water in the pipe and increasing the chance that a spill may occur. Spills can also come from storm overflows in emergency situations, for example, when equipment fails.

Some storm overflows can serve extremely large catchments. This means that whilst there may have been no rainfall in one part of the catchment, there could have been in another. Rainwater can also sometimes take a while to drain down through our systems, and reach the overflow, which is why an overflow may be spilling on a relatively dry day. Additionally, any surface water or river flooding that has occurred may continue to impact our drainage systems after rainfall has ceased. There could also be some very short duration storm overflow discharges that may be symptomatic of a full drainage system in drain-down.

We absolutely understand the public concern there is about the use of storm overflows and while we have made progress in reducing spills, we know there is much more to do. Changing the sewer system and the way the North West is plumbed can’t happen overnight but we are committed to making the step change required.

We are now embarking on the largest multi-billion investment programme in a century, investing £13

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billion between 2025 and 2030 to upgrade the water and wastewater systems in the North West. In addition, the plan is securing 30,000 jobs in the wider supply chain across the region, of which 7,000 are new job opportunities, helping to support the local economy.

It will take time to re-plumb the North West but we have already started. The latest figures show that we are moving in the right direction against our target to achieve a 60% reduction in spills over the decade to 2030. We have now achieved just over a 45% reduction in spills since 2020, so we are ahead of target.

Reducing the need for storm overflows to operate means we must reduce the amount of rainfall getting into the pipes in the first place. We are working with others, such as local authorities and housing developers, on solutions to remove rainwater from the sewer network and slow the flow of water across catchment land, such as installing sustainable drainage on new build developments and limiting run off from highways too.

In addition to creating more storage capacity at our treatment works and separating surface water runoff from the sewers, we are also improving the day-to-day operation of our sewer system. We're installing thousands of sensors to give us a real-time view of what is happening below ground. Already this is helping us spot problems early and take action to remove blockages before they result in flooding or spillages.

You can read more about what we're doing to improve the network and reduce spills here: What we are doing | United Utilities - Better Rivers

Finally, with regards to your point about discharge volumes, there is no requirement to measure volume of discharge under the environmental permits. We therefore do not hold this data and are unable to provide it in accordance with Regulation 12(4)(a) EIR.

We hope that this response answers your request. However, if you're not satisfied with how we've handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [redacted], and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.

Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Many thanks

We'd love to hear your feedback on how we handled your request! If you have a moment, please complete our short survey here – your input helps us improve our service.