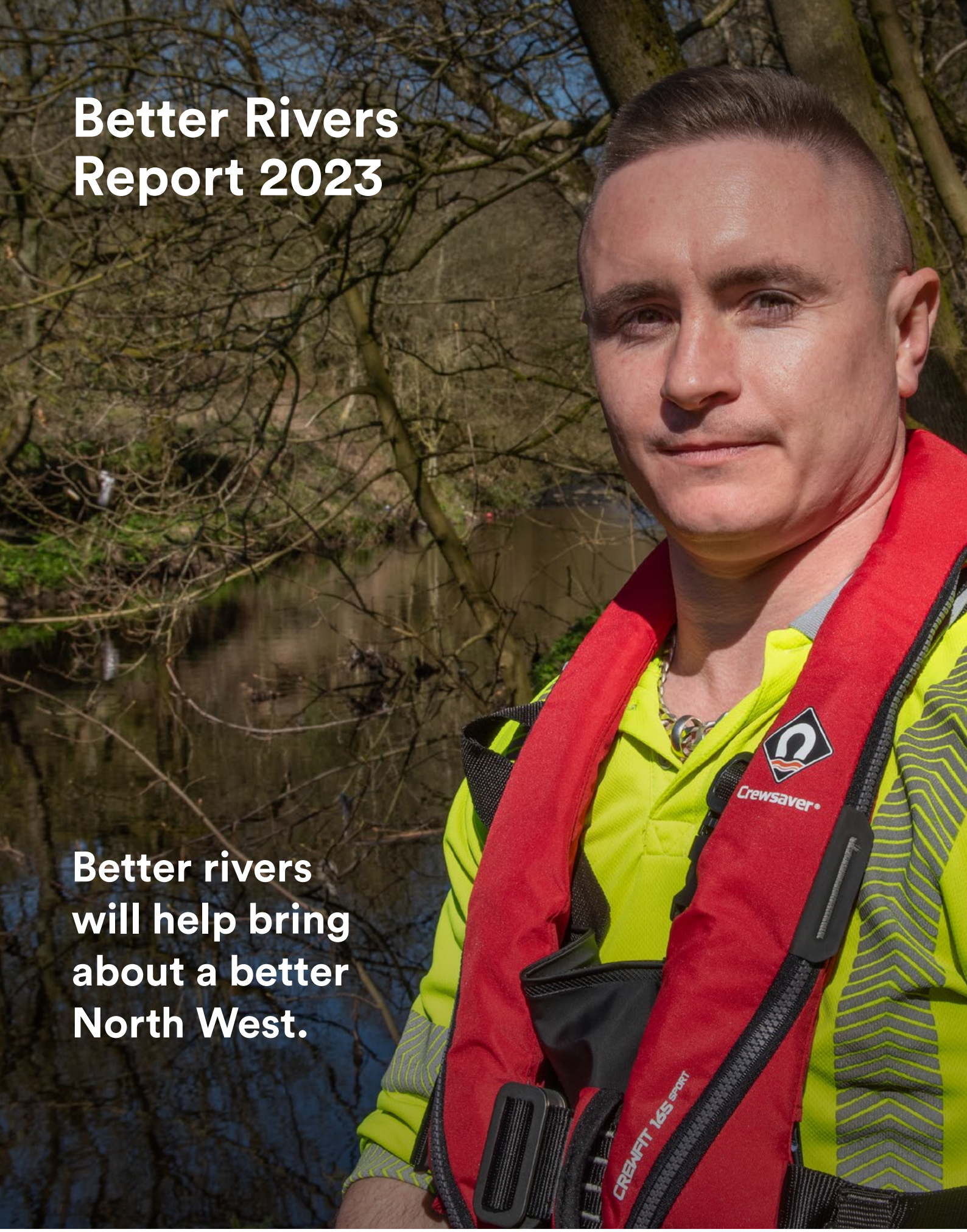
Better Rivers Report 2023



Better rivers will help bring about a better North West.

United Utilities

Water for the North West

Contents

Welcome to our Better Rivers Report for 2022/23

We are focused on improving the quality of the water in our rivers.

There has been significant progress made to improve the region's rivers and seas over the last thirty years. We have prioritised and dealt with many of the most harmful pollutions in order to improve our natural environment, but there is a growing consensus that we need to go further and faster to reduce the number of incidents where sewage is discharged into watercourses.

We agree that it is time to change how the sewer network is designed to cope with this. Re-plumbing the North West's drainage network will require a long-term plan over the next 10 to 20 years, and billions of pounds of investment.

We are taking action to achieve this change by implementing our 'Better Rivers: Better North West' plan that we launched last year.

Within this report we outline the facts, describe the challenges we face and report against the pledges and commitments that we made as part of our Better Rivers plan. Over the last couple of years, we have invested more than £250 million in the North West and delivered a 39 per cent reduction in CSO spills. That's encouraging – but we know it's not enough. We're making progress but there's still a long way to go.

Helping you to navigate and understand this report:

Many of our pledges and commitments are ongoing and have different time horizons and durations. To help understand our progress to date we have benchmarked each of our 29 commitments using an 'accelerator scale', providing an illustration of the level in which we have tackled each commitment over the past 12 months.

Our commitments are reported using three categories, consisting of five progress levels:

3. Commitments where progress is being made (which we've split out into three further categories).

2. Initiatives that have been started and build on solid foundations.

1. Commitments where we're developing strong plans ahead of implementation.

Message from the CEO

Louise Beardmore
CEO

Our four pledges

Pledge 1 – Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health

Pledge 2 – Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans

Pledge 3 – Making rivers beautiful and supporting others to improve and care for them

Pledge 4 – Creating more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways

Better Rivers: Better North West

This year, I've had the honour of becoming CEO of United Utilities, a business with the North West at its heart, which over the last five years has invested more than £5.8 billion to improve the region's infrastructure and create highly-skilled jobs for hundreds of young people in our communities.

I am very clear about the responsibilities we have to deliver great services for customers, to protect and enhance the environment we all want to enjoy and to make sure that we are investing in the region to support future growth and address climate change.

We have heard what people think when it comes to the use of storm overflows. No-one wants to see sewage finding its way into our rivers and seas. I get it and completely understand those concerns. We have an ambitious plan to address this right across the North West – which will be one of the largest environmental improvement programmes of its kind in the country.

I am also pleased to say, working with regulators, we have been able to bring forward investment to the tune of £914 million, meaning we can do more sooner, which will help reduce the use of overflows. We have already taken action, with shareholders investing more than £250 million and delivering a 39 per cent reduction in spills since 2020 – but we know that's not enough.

> "Since 2020, we have reduced spills by over one third and aim to build on this year on year."

I have to be honest – we are not going to be able to sort this overnight. Like the change from diesel and petrol to a world with electric vehicles, this will require a long-term plan over the next 10 to 20 years and will need billions of pounds of investment. It will need a fundamental re-plumb of the region's sewer system, moving us away from the use of combined storm pipes. These carry a mix of both surface water run-off from rainfall and wastewater flushed down our toilets or sinks. They have been a design feature in this country for hundreds of years. However, now we will need to separate these pipes and also create new ways of dealing with excess wastewater at times of heavy rainfall. This will need a varied mix of solutions, from large new storage tanks to innovative nature based solutions. These solutions will take time to deliver, but are essential to prevent overflows into rivers or flooding of homes and businesses.

We are convinced that the best solution is to better manage rainfall, but we cannot do this on our own. We need the help and support of many organisations – local authorities, highways, landowners, farmers and regulators – to work with us to slow the flow of rainfall so we can achieve good ecological status for our waterbodies.

I've become even more determined that United Utilities will play a pivotal role in the success of our region, so we can make it stronger, greener and healthier. This isn't some lofty aspiration. As an organisation we provide services to almost every single resident in the North West – a real privilege with immense responsibility.

So we agree that things have to change, by taking action right now and having an ambitious longer-term plan to make real progress. I give you my commitment that tackling pollution, to improve water quality and the biodiversity of our environment, is one of our top priorities.

97%

of all our storm overflows are now monitored

> “£914m – bringing forward investment to deliver region-wide benefits including reducing spills from storm overflows.”

Storm overflows – key facts

About storm overflows

Storm overflows have been a feature of sewer systems for over

150 years

acting as pressure relief valves to protect homes and businesses from the risk of flooding when there is too much rainfall

Over half of our sewer network,

54%,

is combined, so it fills up more quickly when it rains. On average, 33 per cent of sewers are combined; but in Liverpool it is 84 per cent

Sewers are typically no more than around

15% full

during dry conditions so it is heavy rainfall that causes overflows to operate

Changing pressures

Over the next

25 years

we expect more extreme rainfall events. Extreme events are becoming ever more common and increasing in severity

Our region's population of

7.3m

is expected to grow significantly in the next 25 years, with 600,000 more people living in 310,000 new homes in the North West

Met Office data shows average annual water runoff in our region is

28%

higher than the average for England and Wales, which means more water runs into our sewers

Read our Storm Overflows Report:

unitedutilities.com/globalassets/documents/pdf/united-utilities-storm-overflow.pdf

Our response

Over the last 30 years the water sector has invested

£30bn

to improve the natural environment

By 2025, we will have improved

184km

of the region's rivers

Bringing forward

£914m

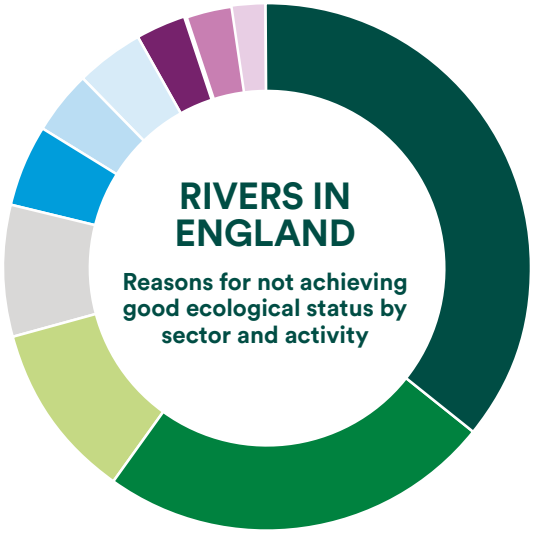
of investment to deliver region-wide environmental benefits, including reducing spills from overflows

We are working towards achieving the Government's 2050 target of reducing average spills per overflow to no more than

10 times

per year

Rivers and the challenges in front of us



“Collaborating with others to support the achievement of better river quality is key to future and sustained success for our region’s rivers and waterways.”

- Agriculture and Rural Management 36%
- Water Industry 24%
- Urban Development and Transport 11%
- No specific Sector (eg Non-native species) 8%
- Other* 5%
- Public (eg Misconnected Plumbing) 4%
- Local and Central Government 4%
- Under Investigation 3%
- Industry 3%
- Mining and Quarrying 2%

Source: Environment Agency
* Other includes: Navigation/Recreation/Waste

In the early 90s, over a fifth of sewage was not being treated properly, killing huge swathes of life in oxygen ‘dead zones’.

Many rivers became rich in toxic metals, agricultural slurry and industrial chemicals. Particularly from the 1950s, the numbers of invertebrates, fish and mammals in or around rivers started to plummet.

The water industry is proud to have played a leading part in the fightback. Over the last 30 years we have invested £30 billion in the environment, increasing the number of bathing waters meeting minimum standards to over 97 per cent this year. We have seen habitats and species recover, including those sensitive to water quality, such as recovery in recent decades of England’s otter population.

However, we need to go further and faster, working in partnership with other stakeholders to achieve the best possible environmental outcomes.

Everyone, from river users and customer groups to environmental Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), needs to work together to respond to these challenges. Crucially, with other sectors responsible for three-quarters of the reasons for harm in rivers, this needs to be a combined endeavour.

There are three urgent challenges that demand we transform our approach:

1. Climate change will change river flows, increase the concentration of pollutants, and increase the growth of algae. This is an urgent threat to water quality[1].
2. Only 14 per cent of rivers are rated good and this hasn’t changed since 2009 despite significant investment from the water sector. The Government target is for three-quarters of rivers to reach that standard by 2027.
3. The public’s expectations for their rivers, and what they wish to do in them, has changed as water quality has improved. The popularity of activities like angling, water sports and open swimming has increased over the last 20 years[2] and was catalysed during the COVID-19 pandemic as more people connected with nature. A majority now identify river health as one of their ‘top three’ environmental concerns[3].

Read more at: water.org.uk/rivers

1 Source: UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment (CCRA3)
2 Sources: Watersports Participation Survey, Environment Agency Rod License sales
3 Source: Water UK polling of 2096 respondents, England and Wales, May 2021

Pledge 1

Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:
Aim to deliver a significant reduction in impact caused by storm overflows and sewage treatment works by 2030	
Implement water quality impact monitoring at our overflows no later than 2025	
Deliver £230 million in environmental improvements, supporting at least a one-third sustainable reduction in the number of spills recorded from our storm overflows by 2025 compared to the 2020 baseline	
Reduce category 1-3 pollution incidents by at least 50 per cent by 2025 against a 2012 baseline.	
Aim for no (serious) pollution incidents from our assets	
Recruit over 100 green apprentices by 2025	

All commitments are ongoing with different time horizons – the speedometer indicates how fast we're progressing on each commitment.

Progress so far:

As a result of our efforts to improve the monitoring and operation of storm overflows, along with periods of dry weather over the last two years, the frequency and duration of storm overflow operation has reduced significantly since 2020. The data shows:

- 39 per cent reduction in spill numbers;
- 41 per cent reduction in spill duration;
- 41 per cent reduction in the average; recorded spill frequency.

As we enter year four of the current AMP7 five-year investment period, we are making good progress, implementing 29 schemes to reduce spills from these overflows by 47 per cent.

Through the implementation of our Pollution Incident Reduction Plan (PIRP), we continue to achieve sector-leading performance with no serious pollution incidents over the last three years. This sustained performance is a result of a suite of related actions:

- improving power resilience at operational sites as 30 per cent of incidents result from power issues;
- creation of 'mitigation squads' with six fully equipped vehicles to prevent overland flows from entering a watercourse or surface water system;
- relentless campaigning on sewer blockages and fats, oils and greases; and
- enhancing search engine optimisation to make it easier to report potential pollutions.

The 2021 Environment Act requires all water companies to continuously monitor water quality upstream and downstream of all outfalls, in near real-time, by 2030. We have been conducting water quality trials using two differing sensors, selected on their respective abilities to address the requirements of the Act and to test innovative technologies.

Both proved successful – one emulated the requirements of the Act by having near real-time monitoring upstream and downstream of an outfall while the other acted as our first continuous, near real-time water quality monitor, with high levels of accuracy demonstrating the sensors' ability to replace laboratory sampling. We are now planning how we roll out sensors across various locations.

Many apprentices we recruit will be trained for jobs that will deliver an environmental benefit such as maintaining wastewater treatment works that return used water back safely to watercourses. We are on track to recruit 100 by 2025.

Mark Garth
Wastewater Treatment Director
United Utilities

"We continue to achieve sector leading performance with no serious pollution incidents over the last three years"

CEO challenge team
United Utilities

"We have been conducting water quality trials using two differing sensors to test innovative technologies … both have proved successful"

Pledge 1

Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health (continued)

CASE STUDY

Dynamic Network Management

Given the pressures of population growth, climate change, sewer misuse and ageing assets, Dynamic Network Management, or DNM, is about improving service by minimising flood and pollution events across our wastewater network and diverse, geographically-spread treatment assets.

DNM, which has been in use since 2021, collects data from our assets and the environment in real time from over 29,000 sensors that have been installed across 78,000 kilometres of sewer network and 3,600 pumping stations.

This data is subjected to descriptive, diagnostic and predictive analytics through an artificial intelligence (AI) platform, enabling us to address issues before they are visible to customers and potentially cause harm to the environment.

Our investment in DNM was around £100 million, requiring a transformation in the way we operate, both organisationally and digitally. We now have a fully integrated and connected view, optimising the whole system performance in a predictive and preventative way.

By joining up our wastewater assets into a single system, we are delivering several benefits. To date we have proactively detected over 3,500 issues. Over 70 per cent of these are related to sewer blockages and a further 20 per cent linked to external flooding. In all, we have reduced the amount of reactive work on our sewer network by 10 per cent.

This proactive approach is delivering other benefits too, such as fewer carbon emissions through less road miles, running assets more efficiently which reduces cost and making better use of existing assets rather than building new ones.

CASE STUDY

Improving how our assets operate

We have been delivering projects large and small to help improve the quality of water in the region's rivers. The River Eden and shellfish in the Solway Firth are set to benefit from upgrades to our wastewater treatment works in Carlisle. The £50 million project to boost to water quality in the River Eden will protect shellfish in the Solway Firth by reducing the number of times storm overflows operate during periods of heavy rainfall. The project is nearing completion.

This project will increase capacity and enhance the performance at the works to treat greater volumes of storm sewage. New tertiary and storm water treatment processes, and a 3,500 cubic metre storm water storage tank, have been built. The storm tank will hold three and a half million litres, more than an Olympic swimming pool.

Alongside improving the health of the river for the local community, new technology has also been installed that will improve the quality of the final effluent and storm water that is returned to the environment from the treatment works.

And the River Douglas around Adlington in Lancashire will benefit from an £8.9 million project to build a 2,500 cubic metre detention tank to reduce the number of spills during heavy rainfall. Once in operation in 2023, a new trade effluent pipeline will also help manage flows at the local treatment works. This will play its part in boosting the ecological status of that stretch of the river to 'good'.

CASE STUDY

Slowing the flow – largest UK smart water butt trial

A local primary school in Forton, Lancashire is now part of the UK's biggest hi-tech drainage community. The school and around 30 homes in the area received smart water butts in a 12-month trial with the aim of reducing flooding in the area and stopping sewers becoming overloaded during periods of heavy rainfall.

Forton has a historical issue of surface water flooding in the Spring Vale area, a lot of which is caused by the challenge of 'urban creep' – where there's an increase in more tarmac and concrete on driveways and patios, rather than natural grass, and which contribute to more rainwater run-off. Most of this rainwater enters combined sewers, increasing the number of times the overflow comes into operation at the local watercourse.

To try and combat the problem, we have installed smart water butts across the village. They are solar powered, use technology that forecasts rainfall and release water back into the sewer network before the rain begins. This frees up more room to collect the amount of rain that's forecast and prevent any excess from entering the sewage system.

Top marks so far

Since being installed, early findings have shown that the smart water butts were up to 75 times as effective as a standard, well-installed water butt, and could save up to 30,000 litres of water per installation from entering the sewer network during peak demand – that's the equivalent of slowing the water from 166 bath tubs per water butt!

Forton Primary school has had three jumbo-sized smart water butts installed and at the same time the children enjoyed an educational talk about the water cycle, flooding and water resources.

Head Teacher at the school, Lorna Boase, said they were excited to be a part of the trial: "It's a great opportunity for us to play our part in helping reduce the amount of surface water that enters the sewers in the village. The children found the session with United Utilities really fascinating and now have a better understanding of the water cycle and flooding and why it's important to manage what they use at home."

Johnny Phillips, United Utilities' Surface Water Strategy Development Manager said the smart water butts will make a real difference in the village when it comes to flooding, and will help to increase capacity in the sewer network, as well as deliver local environmental improvements.

"The issue of 'urban creep' is growing. Innovative approaches like the use of smart water butts will play their part in reducing peak flows into the sewer network and help slow the flow of water which finds its way into the sewer network. If the trial is successful, there is the potential to roll this out further to other areas where it would be beneficial in the North West."

Pledge 2

Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:
Provide greater transparency on the link between environmental performance and remuneration	
In 2022 publish investigations and plans for all overflows that operate frequently. Plans and future investment proposals to be shared with the same customer and stakeholder groups between May and September 2022	
Environmental Performance Committee to be established in September 2022	
Work with stakeholders to provide the information people want and need in an annual report on storm overflows from 2022. Public commentary on our progress on improved monitoring to go into the APR	
Ensure all storm overflows are monitored by 2023	
Aim to provide near real-time data when an overflow operates and make sure this information is easily accessible from 2023 This may be via a national solution which brings together the sector data in one place.	
Hold our first Environmental AGM in 2022 to review performance and progress	
Bring the bright minds of our colleagues and partners together to investigate storm overflow activations and collaborate on innovative solutions	

All commitments are ongoing with different time horizons – the speedometer indicates how fast we're progressing on each commitment.

Progress so far:

We published our first Storm Overflows report in 2022. It was shaped by feedback from customers after we canvassed their views on our 'Better Rivers: Better North West' plan. They were clear that we should report on the steps we are taking to reduce our impact on river health so we published this report to explain what we are doing to deliver a significant reduction in impact caused by storm overflows, in particular those that operate more frequently.

In the remuneration section of our 2022 Annual Report, we describe in detail, as we have for several years, how executive pay is linked to non-financial, as well as financial performance. Over 50 per cent of reward is linked to customer service and environmental performance and this has been strengthened in 2022/23 with every employee having a target to deliver our Better Rivers plan.

The North West's independent challenge group for water, YourVoice, operates with four sub groups, one of which scrutinises our environmental work.

The terms of reference for this group were revised last year for it to take on a formal role in tracking the delivery of our Better Rivers plan and challenging us on progress.

We have more than 2,200 storm overflows in the North West region. 97 per cent are now monitored and we will achieve 100 per cent by the end of 2023. Installing these monitors enables us capture the data that can be shared in real time. More details on what we are doing on monitoring can be found in the case study on page 16.

Read our Storms Overflow Report at:
unitedutilities.com/globalassets/documents/pdf/united-utilities-storm-overflow.pdf

Read our Annual Report at: unitedutilities.annualreport2022.com/

Read YourVoice terms of reference at:
yourvoiceicg.co.uk/environment/environment-terms-of-reference/

Chris Matthews
Head of Regional Engagement
United Utilities

"We published our first Storm Overflows Report in 2022 shaped by feedback from customers"

Neil Glover
Better Rivers Programme Director
United Utilities

"We have more than 2,200 storm overflows in the North West… 97 per cent are now monitored and we will achieve 100 per cent by the end of 2023."

Pledge 2

Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans (continued)

CASE STUDY

Acting with openness and transparency

In 2022, we held our first Environmental AGM, chaired by the environmental lead for the North West's independent challenge group, YourVoice. Led by the CEO designate, the session covered a broad range of topics including climate change mitigation and adaption, biodiversity and land management, pollution and water quality and other environmental impacts such as leakage, water use, managing waste and biosolids.

Participants included local nature partnerships, wildlife trusts, rivers trusts, combined authorities and other environmental stakeholders and over 30 environmental champions joined the session. Attendees were invited to ask questions of the CEO designate and three other directors with responsibility for environmental strategy and operations.

There were four key elements to the agenda:

- look back at UU performance over past 12 months;
- look ahead to key themes emerging from PR24 planning;
- feedback from attendees;
- exploring the idea of convening an Environmental AGM for the North West in 2023.

While the AGM was primarily an opportunity for stakeholders to hold the company to account for its environmental performance, it did result in some specific follow on actions.

Sharing our work with others is an important part of our Better Rivers plan. In February 2023, we hosted the water sector's first Pollution Summit to share best practice on measures being taken by companies to reduce the frequency of pollution events. Senior representatives (typically wastewater operations directors) from every company attended and several presented details on projects that have made a tangible difference – our contribution focused on the successful implementation of our pollution incident reduction plan and our Dynamic Network Management project (see page 10). Water UK also attended, convening a session on the emerging pollution roadmap for the sector. All agreed that the exchange of intelligence was invaluable and that a future session would be welcome.

CASE STUDY

Monitoring

Spills from storm overflows are a big area of focus for the whole industry as part of improving river health.

Following keen interest from the public and Government, and publication of the new Environment Act 2021, ambitious targets have been set for a progressive but substantial reduction in spill frequency across the country.

As part of this, the Environment Agency requires all water companies to fit monitors to their storm overflows in order to capture information on how they are performing.

We measure the frequency and duration of storm overflow operations using Event Duration Monitors (EDMs) and have reported on this since 2020.

There are over 2,200 storm overflows in the North West and we have installed event monitors on over 2,000 overflows with 100 per cent coverage to be achieved by 2023.

The data gathered from these monitors has and will continue to be used to identify frequently spilling overflows to be investigated. The outcome of these will identify potential cost-beneficial spill reduction schemes.

We now have a greater understanding of the region's vast 78,000 kilometre wastewater system than at any point in history, providing a rich source of data to assess and inform activity to improve the system.

For example:

- in 2020, we reported data from 1,932 monitors;
- in 2021, we reported data from 1,994 monitors; and
- in 2022, we reported data from 2,004 monitors.

2022 was an average year for rainfall in the North West and the number of times overflows operate is likely to vary up and down depending upon the weather. We do, however, expect to continue to see an overall downward trend in the number and duration of storm overflow operations as we deliver our largest ever environmental programme to re-plumb the North West's drainage network.

Our performance in 2022 means we have made strong progress on our target to make a sustainable reduction on the number of storm overflow spills compared to the 2020 baseline. This is one of the commitments in our Better Rivers: Better North West plan.

While we are pleased with the progress delivered so far, we recognise that there is more we could do, both individually and as a sector. The Government has asked us to go faster, and we have responded by identifying additional investment that could be spent in AMP7 but would be fully recovered in AMP8.

Pledge 3

Making rivers beautiful and supporting others to improve and care for them

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:
Use our convening powers to help others address their contribution to river health	
Convene a North West Rivers Summit in 2022	
In 2022, launch a new partnership to protect watercourses with farmers to incentivise farming practices that reduce impact	
Plant over 1 million trees by 2030	
100 per cent of our SSSIs in favourable or recovering status by 2030	
From 2023, create a movement of North West citizen scientists to collect data on river health	
Fund local universities and research studies to understand river health	

All commitments are ongoing with different time horizons – the speedometer indicates how fast we're progressing on each commitment.

Commitment:	Status:
Substantial update to be published regarding developments of partnerships with (1) National and Local Rivers Trust and (2) GMCA and EA	
In 2023, launch a Community Fund to support groups to improve our rivers	
Work with partners Rivers Trust, RSPB and local authorities to deliver projects	
Catalyse our network of employee volunteers to focus on river health	
Advocate for the removal of the automatic right to connect	
Champion legislation to ban wet wipes that contain plastic and lobby for a ban on all wet wipes that are not ‘Fine to Flush’	

Pledge 3

Making rivers beautiful and supporting others to improve and care for them (continued)

Progress so far:

In addition to investing in our wastewater assets to improve the way they operate, we have worked closely with others to tackle some of the issues that impact river water quality. If we are to reduce the amount of rainfall entering our sewers and prevent sources of pollution entering watercourses, we can't do this on our own.

In November 2022, we convened the region's first 'Future Rivers Forum' with the aim of identifying new collaborations and collective action to improve river health. We discuss this further in the case study below.

During the Forum, we announced our commitment of £500,000 to develop a North West agricultural network to share best practice, improve support for delivery of catchment improvements and increase access to third party funding. Conversations with agricultural stakeholders highlighted opportunities to create a coordinated network as part of a long-term approach to establish sustainable farming clusters. Potential benefits including accelerating nature friendly farming to improve river water quality, biodiversity and soil health.

We are active participants in the Love Windermere partnership, launched in July 2022. It is the most significant collaboration between stakeholders from a range of sectors to tackle water quality challenges in the lake. The partnership is developing a science-based plan to set out a road map for environmental protection for the lake. In part this will be informed by citizen science-based projects already underway – volunteers have been taking samples from one hundred locations in and around the lake at different time across the year,

providing the most comprehensive snapshot of water quality in the lake and its tributaries.

Since 2000 we've invested more than £75 million upgrading wastewater treatment sites, pumping stations and sewers around Windermere. We are now going to bring forward £19 million to be spent over the next two years to further reduce storm overflows around Windermere.

In Greater Manchester, we are working closely with the Combined Authority, creating an integrated water management plan. This is bringing together all the relevant bodies who make a contribution to the improved management of water quantity and quality. The plan will help support the aims of improving river health by looking at issues such as how can we collectively tackle the impact of excess rainfall and help slow the flow of water, reducing what goes into the sewer network, needs to be treated and can end up in rivers and waterways.

Part of our plan includes our contribution to seeking legislative change. We welcome recent announcements by the Government to consult on the implementation of Schedule 3 of the 2010 Flood and Water Management Act and a ban on plastic wet wipes.

CASE STUDY

Future Rivers Forum

We are always looking at what more we can do to support our communities, enhance the local environment, and engage more effectively with our partners.

In partnership with the Rivers Trust, we hosted the North West's first Future Rivers Forum to drive awareness and address the challenges that face rivers across the region including climate change, population growth and pollution.

The Future Rivers Forum brought together a cross section of people and organisations including local authority representatives, North West businesses, environmental bodies, water sector regulators and local community figures to encourage greater collaboration to improve the health of the region's rivers.

Hosted by Roger Harrabin, the BBC's former environment correspondent, the day consisted of a mixture of speakers from United Utilities, The Rivers Trust, Natural Course and the Nature North Partnership, as well as networking and interactive sprint workshops to identify new opportunities to work together.

Our Director of Wastewater Treatment Mark Garth talked about the scale of the challenge to improve river health and what the company is already doing.

The Chief Executive of the Rivers Trust, Mark Lloyd, spoke about the need to work together and take meaningful action, with opportunities around new financing models to be explored.

Attendees also discussed the challenges their industries face, shared solutions and committed to put words into actions and create a lasting impact that goes beyond the day's events. Collaboration, funding, and nature-based solutions were key themes to emerge from discussions.

During the day, we also announced our commitment of £500,000 to develop a North West agricultural network to share best practice, improve delivery of catchment improvements and increase access to third party funding.

CASE STUDY

River Rangers

We have an important role to play in improving river health across the region, engaging with the local communities and organisations around our sites and assets.

To protect our rivers and help to keep them healthy, we have recruited a brand new team of six River Rangers who will be based across the region.

The Rangers will be working with teams across our catchments to forge close links and engage with community groups and organisations and work with them to improve the environment and river water quality in those areas.

They'll be proactively patrolling the banks of rivers, checking assets to organise maintenance and cleaning litter and debris to mitigate against the aesthetic impact of our operations.

In Greater Manchester, the Rangers have already started to make a difference by cleaning up sewage debris from various overflows and starting to build on our relationships with groups like the Mersey Rivers Trust and Friends of the Tame.

The River Rangers' work will allow us to further understand the quality of rivers across our region and what more we need to do to protect their health and help them thrive.

If successful, the plan is to hire more Rangers to support our activities right across the North West.

Simon Chadwick
Chief Operating Officer
United Utilities

"The River Rangers' work will allow us to further understand the quality of rivers across our region and what more we need to do to protect their health and help them thrive"

Daniel Lynch
River Ranger
United Utilities

"It's great to be able to work with teams across our catchments to forge close links and engage with community groups"

Pledge 4

Creating more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:
In 2030, 95 per cent of customers will be no further than 30 miles from a bathing water	
Play our part in creating and promoting additional inland bathing waters in the North West	
Work with others to create 10 new recreational clubs at our reservoirs for all our customers to enjoy by 2030	

All commitments are ongoing with different time horizons – the speedometer indicates how fast we're progressing on each commitment.

Initiatives rolled-out:

Our pledges commit us to supporting the process for the designation of inland bathing waters, which is instigated by third parties. In support of this, we've undertaken detailed analysis of existing designated waters and proximity to North West residents and have identified that people living in parts of South Manchester and Cheshire are currently beyond 30 miles from a designated bathing water.

We have engaged with stakeholders to understand any local appetite to identify a bathing water and what it would mean for our assets. Such investigations will form part of our Water Industry National Environment Plan (WINEP) submission. A key part in delivering this commitment is working with partners and landowners and we will continue this dialogue.

We've also begun work to create new recreational clubs at our reservoirs. Details of this are set out in the case study on page 22.

"In our next five-year business plan from 2025 to 2030, we are proposing a £3 billion programme to improve over 400 storm overflows."

CASE STUDY

Piloting opportunities to increase recreational clubs

We want to encourage use of and access to rivers and reservoirs for recreational, leisure and sports activities where these can be enjoyed in a safe and controlled environment.

Following an increase in the take up of water-based activities, particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic, recreational clubs approached us wanting to include stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) as part of their water sports licence on our reservoirs.

Our current approach permits the use of SUPs at five of our 180 reservoirs, awarded following a detailed risk assessment and including all appropriate health and safety controls.

In response to demand for more activities, United Utilities, with support from British Canoeing and Royal Yachting Association (RYA), commissioned a three-month trial at six sites to review safety elements of SUPs.

The initial trial covered sites where the incumbent water sports club is already affiliated with the RYA and has good foundations in sailing and other water sports.

With public health and safety at the forefront of our thinking, the trial examined several important elements:

- thorough testing of the risk assessment process;
- testing implementation and compliance monitoring at different locations and club types;
- exploring the suitability of controls (e.g. lifeguards, safety boats, and signage);
- testing whether increased permitted use would encourage copycat behaviour; and
- assessing the extent of the participation and implications for both the company and the Licenced Club.

In addition, from an environmental perspective, the trial also considered how to mitigate biosecurity risk as a result of increased pathways for invasive non-native species when paddleboards are used in different water bodies and so potentially transfer species.

The trial came to a conclusion in October 2022 and as a result, stand-up paddleboarding is now a firm part of our access and recreation proposition, delivered through collaboration with the RYA and our licenced recreation clubs.

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

unitedutilities.com

United Utilities

Water for the North West