Better Rivers Report 2024

United Utilities

Water for the North West

Contents

Our four pledges:

1. Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health
2. Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans
3. Making rivers beautiful and supporting others to improve and care for them
4. Creating more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways

Welcome to our Better Rivers Report for 2023/24

Over the last 12 months, we've made really good progress delivering the 29 commitments we first set out in 2022 to improve river water quality across the North West.

In this report, you can read about the new teams we have created who have already made a strong start on a proposed £3.1 billion investment programme, accelerating £200 million worth of improvements at key storm overflow locations across the region. For example, at our small wastewater treatment works at Cargo in Cumbria, we have rapidly deployed a solution that has seen near-daily spills reduce to just nine between September 2023 and year end.

We share news about our growing team of River Rangers who have worked with communities, customers and regional partners to bring about real change and make positive impacts on river environments through litter picks, water sampling and invasive species clearance.

There's more about how we are now reporting data for each of our storm overflows, giving us more visibility of storm overflow performance than ever before.

The performance of storm overflows has continued to be of considerable interest to customers, campaigning groups, the media and in political forums and we will continue to share the progress we are making to deliver the improvement to our rivers and watercourses we all want to see. We've made good progress – but there's more to do and we're committed to the cause.

Key facts about our region and storm overflows

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, which means sewage from homes and businesses combines with rainwater from roads and roofs. These sewers fill up more quickly when it rains. Across the country, the average is around 33%

Sewers are typically no more than around

15% full

during dry conditions so it is heavy rain that causes overflows to operate, discharging contaminated rainfall into the environment.

Changing pressures

Over the next

25 years

we expect more extreme rainfall events. These are becoming ever more common and increasing in severity as a result of climate change.

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.

We're working hard to improve river health

Many of us at United Utilities live and work in the North West and want to see cleaner rivers and waterways. We recognise the critical role we play in achieving this on behalf of the communities we serve.

We're committed to making the step change people want to see. We will continue to build on the improvements and investment made so far in how we treat wastewater to reduce the number of times storm overflows operate during times of heavy rainfall.

What we've achieved this year

Improved river health

Our River Rangers have supported multiple community groups and partners in joint activities to bring about improvements to our region's rivers. From litter picks and removal of invasive vegetation to water sampling, our growing team of Rangers backs up the work of our engineering and capital delivery teams, who are rolling out multi-million pound storm overflow improvement projects across the region.

Reduced spills per overflow

24% since 2020

We have seen a 24% reduction in average spills per monitored overflow compared with our 2020 baseline, thanks to improved operational and data processes in addition to an early start on our proposed £3.1 billion storm overflow plan. With significantly higher rainfall in 2023 compared to 2022, and more monitoring providing increased visibility of overflow activations, we reported a 40% increase in spills for 2023.

Better monitoring

100%

We now have visibility of the performance of all 2,264 of our storm overflows as 100% of them are now fitted with an event duration monitor. These monitors record when, and for how long, a storm overflow discharges to the environment.

Increased investment

£200m

We've made a head start on our ambitious investment plan for 2025 to 2030 by bringing forward £200 million of investment in storm overflows. That is part of a larger £3.1 billion programme to reduce spills from storm overflows by 60% over the decade to 2030.

For more information on what we've being doing to improve our rivers, read the case studies on page 4.

Message from our CEO

Delivering an ambitious plan

Louise Beardmore
CEO

“Thousands of my colleagues are already taking steps to reduce storm overflow operation.”

Thank you for taking the time to read our 2024 Better Rivers Report. I am delighted to update you on the progress we’ve made over the past 12 months to deliver our commitments to improve rivers right across the North West.

I completely understand the concerns many people have about storm overflows and what impact they have on the environment. I’ve lived and worked in the North West my whole life and I share those concerns too.

That is why we have submitted to the water regulator, Ofwat, the largest proposed investment in water and wastewater infrastructure in over 100 years to transform the region’s waterways. We are proposing to spend £3.1 billion on storm overflows, targeting a 60% reduction in spills in the ten years up to 2030. Our plan reflects a proposed investment of a further £3 billon to protect and enhance over 500 kilometres of rivers, improve bathing waters and shellfish beds by enhancing wastewater treatment and reducing the amount of nutrients entering our watercourses.

This is an ambitious plan that will see us working right across the North West’s five counties. In addition, we will be working with local authorities to separate rainwater from our systems so we build more resilient communities as we all respond to the impacts of climate change, such as more flooding.

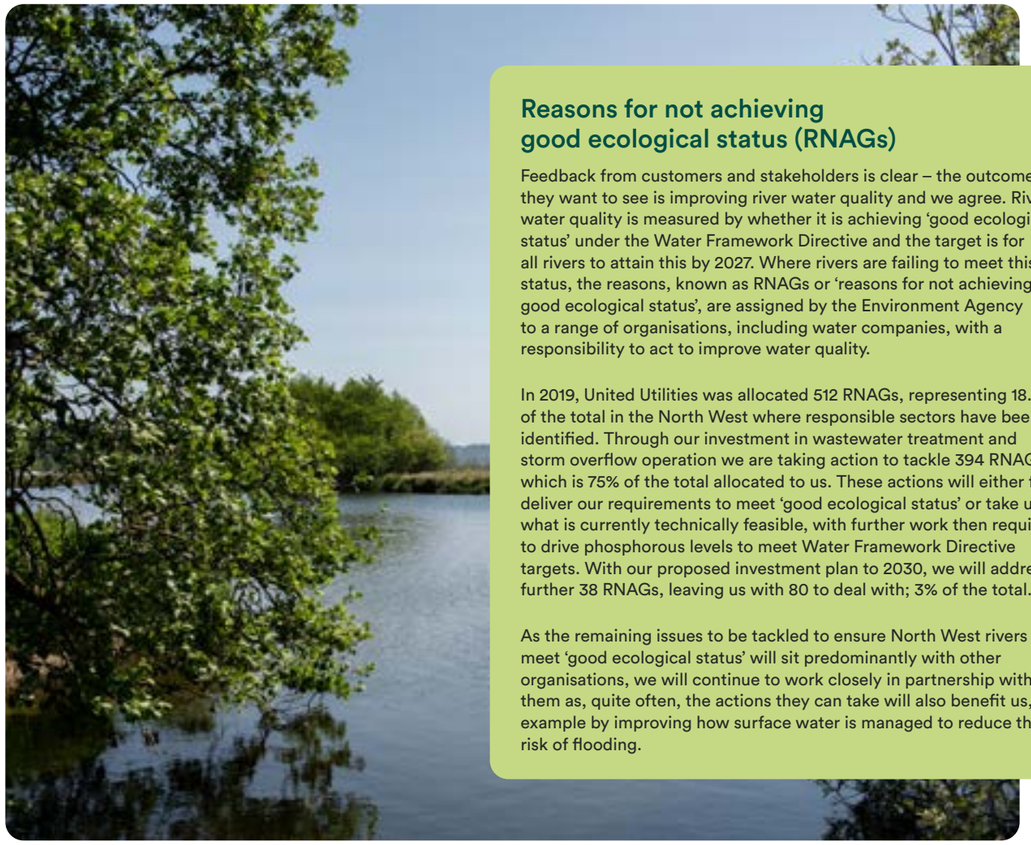
We are making an early start and thousands of my colleagues are already taking steps to reduce storm overflows operating. For example, at Cargo, near Carlisle, we have built new storage to capture more rainfall and, as a result, overflow spills have reduced from over 340 in 2022 to just nine between September 2023 and the year end. In Southwaite, near Tebay Services, we have installed a reed bed to act as a natural filter for storm water, improving the quality of water put back to the environment. You can read about more examples of the positive impact we’re having later in this report.

I am particularly proud of our new teams of River Rangers, working across the region to engage with the local communities and organisations around our sites. Our team has been forging closer links with community groups and organisations to improve the environment and river water quality. Since October 2023, they have covered more than 3 million steps and collected 538 bags of litter. They are supported by our Better Rivers community fund, open to all grass roots groups with a passion for their local river and are keen to buy some materials to clear away litter and keep it clean.

On dry days our sewers are typically only 15% full, so an important part of the solution is to better manage rain as it can quickly fill sewers to capacity when it falls heavily. This will help reduce the amount of contaminated rainfall reaching the environment. We have an important part to play in this but the most effective solutions need many partners – local authorities, highways, landowners, farmers and regulators – to work with us to slow the flow of rainfall. There are some great case studies included in this report of work already underway.

It is early days in delivering this massive change to re-plumb the North West’s drainage network that will require investment up to 2050. We are making good progress and I am determined we will go as fast as we can to implement this ambitious plan. This report provides you with much more information on what we’ve been doing and we welcome any feedback you might have on any other steps we can take to further improve the region’s river water quality.

You can contact us at
myaccount.unitedutilities.com/contactus



Reasons for not achieving good ecological status (RNAGs)

Feedback from customers and stakeholders is clear – the outcome they want to see is improving river water quality and we agree. River water quality is measured by whether it is achieving ‘good ecological status’ under the Water Framework Directive and the target is for all rivers to attain this by 2027. Where rivers are failing to meet this status, the reasons, known as RNAGs or ‘reasons for not achieving good ecological status’, are assigned by the Environment Agency to a range of organisations, including water companies, with a responsibility to act to improve water quality.

In 2019, United Utilities was allocated 512 RNAGs, representing 18.5% of the total in the North West where responsible sectors have been identified. Through our investment in wastewater treatment and storm overflow operation we are taking action to tackle 394 RNAGs, which is 75% of the total allocated to us. These actions will either fully deliver our requirements to meet ‘good ecological status’ or take us to what is currently technically feasible, with further work then required to drive phosphorous levels to meet Water Framework Directive targets. With our proposed investment plan to 2030, we will address a further 38 RNAGs, leaving us with 80 to deal with; 3% of the total.

As the remaining issues to be tackled to ensure North West rivers meet ‘good ecological status’ will sit predominantly with other organisations, we will continue to work closely in partnership with them as, quite often, the actions they can take will also benefit us, for example by improving how surface water is managed to reduce the risk of flooding.

500km
Our proposed plan will protect and enhance over 500 kilometres of rivers and improve bathing waters and shellfish beds

60%
Over the decade to 2030, targeting a 60% reduction in overflow activations

Making a real difference across our five counties

Our beautiful region is a combination of protected rural and more densely populated urban towns and cities, with over 800 miles of coastline, around 430 miles of river, 29 designated bathing waters, national parks, and sites of special scientific interest. Its scale and geography all contribute to the challenge of improving our rivers, lakes and seas.

Cumbria

Agile approach leads to dramatic improvement at Cargo

Find out more at unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/what-we-are-doing/case-studies/cumbria

Lancashire

£77.7 million upgrade to Burnley Wastewater Treatment Works

Find out more at unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/what-we-are-doing/case-studies/lancashire

Merseyside

Another new chapter for the amazing Mersey

Find out more at unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/what-we-are-doing/case-studies/merseyside

Greater Manchester

Preparing for storms at Sunny Bank, Bury to improve water quality in Parr Brook and River Roch

Find out more at unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/what-we-are-doing/case-studies/greater-manchester

Cheshire

Improving water quality in the River Bollin

Find out more at unitedutilities.com/better-rivers/what-we-are-doing/case-studies/cheshire

Read more about the positive impact we're having across the five counties on the next page.

Case study: Cumbria

Agile approach leads to dramatic improvement at Cargo

Cargo, a village near the River Eden on the Solway Plain in Cumbria, has a small wastewater treatment works that services 254 homes. The location is relatively remote, and the works has no mains power so is reliant on a gravity-based system. The size, scale and location of the site brings multiple challenges, and the local storm overflow was spilling frequently, discharging into a local water course.

Following approval of our proposed Accelerated Infrastructure Delivery programme, we moved quickly to create a new solution. In just 14 weeks, we installed a new tank to provide storage for spills and an additional storm tank to add a further 75m³ capacity, completing that work in August 2023.

Where previously the site could treat 3 litres of wastewater a second, it now treats 17 litres a second. Crucially, spills have reduced significantly, from 343 in 2022 to just nine from September 2023 up to the end of March 2024.

As part of our commitment to create better rivers, we're proposing to invest £914 million to reduce spills from 158 storm overflows across Cumbria.

Case study: Lancashire

£77.7 million upgrade to Burnley Wastewater Treatment Works

The existing facility at Burnley Wastewater Treatment Works wasn't designed to deal with the growing population in the area. A £77.7 million upgrade to the works will see the introduction of new treatment processes and additional storm water storage, enabling the facility to meet growing demand from Burnley and surrounding towns by increasing capacity by 27%.

This major overhaul of the facility will reduce the number of times that storm overflows operate in periods of heavy rain and enhance the water quality in the River Calder. We expect the project to be complete by the summer of 2025.

As part of our commitment to create better rivers, we're proposing to invest £729 million to reduce spills from 91 storm overflows across Lancashire.

Case study: Merseyside

Another new chapter for the amazing Mersey

The River Mersey, once known as the dirtiest in Europe, has seen a remarkable transformation – thanks to the hugely successful Mersey Basin Campaign which turned around 200 years of industrial and sewage pollution. Forty-five species of fish found were found in 2023 by The Mersey Estuary Species Hunt, including rays, scorpion fish, types of eel and even the rare venomous bluemouth rockfish.

There's more to do. We're now turning our attention to tackling pollution from storm overflows. Runcorn Wastewater Treatment Works sits on the side of the Manchester Ship Canal and in heavy rainfall it discharges storm water into the canal and on into the River Mersey. A £4.1 million project is just getting underway at the site that will build additional storage capacity.

As part of our commitment to create better rivers, we're proposing to invest £196 million to reduce spills from 26 storm overflows across Merseyside.

Case study: Greater Manchester

Preparing for storms at Sunny Bank to improve water quality in Parr Brook and the River Roch

Sunny Bank is a semi-rural residential area in the Unsworth area of Bury, Greater Manchester, with a population of 10,000. The area is served by a wastewater treatment works at Blackford Bridge.

The challenge was to improve water quality at the local Parr Brook and River Roch by reducing the number of times a storm overflow operates in the area. After local consultations we began a £2.5 million project in October 2023 to install a new underground storage tank on land next to Glendale Avenue and Sunny Bank Road. The new storm tank holds 500,000 litres and is due to be operational by June 2024. It will help to reduce the number of times the storm overflow operates during periods of heavy rainfall.

As part of our commitment to create better rivers, we're proposing to invest £781 million to reduce spills from 110 storm overflows across Greater Manchester.

Case study: Cheshire

Improving water quality in the River Bollin

Macclesfield Wastewater Treatment Works at Prestbury discharges cleaned water into the River Bollin, a major tributary of the River Mersey, which rises in the forest of Macclesfield on the edge of the Peak District. Investment was needed to lower phosphorus and ammonia levels and to improve the quality of the cleaned water released back into the environment during periods of heavy rainfall. An additional challenge was to install these new processes while continuing to run the existing treatment works and avoiding impact to residents.

We're delivering a £50 million project to add a storm surge storage tank at the site and introduce a new process called Mobile Organic Biofilm™, an innovative biological approach that uses renewable plant material to support the growth of the bacteria we use to treat wastewater.

The additional capacity will meet the needs of the forecasted increase in population, and improvements to the process will improve water quality and reduce ammonia and phosphorus discharges.

As part of our commitment to create better rivers, we're proposing to invest £349 million to reduce spills from 52 storm overflows across Cheshire.

Our four pledges under our Better Rivers programme

Investing for a stronger, greener, healthier North West

We have already taken action, with shareholders investing more than £250 million to help us improve 115 miles of waterways across the North West. In 2022, we launched our Better Rivers: Better North West plan, where we made four pledges.

Our four pledges:

1. **Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health**
2. **Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans**
3. **Making rivers beautiful and supporting others to improve and care for them**
4. **Creating more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways**

Helping you to navigate and understand this report

Many of our pledges and commitments are ongoing and have different time horizons and durations. In the dashboard on the following pages, we've indicated the status of our 29 commitments, demonstrating the progress we've made in tackling each commitment over the past 12 months.

Status key:

- Initiative started
- Making progress
- Good progress
- Completed/ achieved

Delivering our pledges

The recently published National Storm Overflow Plan for England, the biggest investment of its kind in the UK, will require us to invest around £19 billion in the North West.

This will enable us to meet the new requirements of the Environment Act 2021, ensuring that storm overflows each operate less than ten times a year.

We published a new online map to help inform outdoor swimmers, watersports enthusiasts and other members of the public who use the region's rivers, lakes and seas for recreation. The map shows the location of all the storm overflows in the North West, indicating in near real time whether or not they are currently releasing storm water. The map also shows the 27 sites where we are already taking action to reduce overflow operation.

Prioritising our approach

With over 2,250 storm overflows across the North West, we cannot tackle them all in one go. We will invest in overflows based on the following criteria:

- Improve all storm overflows discharging into or near every designated bathing water; and improve 75% of overflows discharging to high priority nature sites by 2035
- Tackle all remaining storm overflows covered, regardless of location, by 2050
- Address those storm overflows associated with 'Reasons for Not Achieving Good' (RNAG) ecological status wherever we have identified the best value solution

We cannot shut down wastewater networks while we make these improvements so in some areas the sequencing of investment will be made to ensure continuity of service to customers.

Driving improvements

We've submitted a plan to the water regulator Ofwat to invest £3.1 billion at 437 storm overflow sites across the North West. Recognising the strength of feeling about this issue, we've already begun some of this work and it's having a positive impact. Find out how we're reducing spills and improving water quality in the following pages that explain progress in meeting our four Better Rivers pledges.

Pledge 1

Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health

1

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Aim to deliver a significant reduction in impact caused by storm overflows and sewage treatment works by 2030	●	As a result of our investment in wastewater treatment and storm overflow operation, we forecast we will have reduced RNAGs by over 75% by 2025 and we are on track to achieve this.
Implement water quality impact monitoring at our overflows no later than 2025	●	We've been carrying out innovation trials to help us identify factors that can affect water quality in lakes and rivers, so that plans can be developed to improve it. Last year, for example, we joined forces with landowner the Graythwaite Estate to trial brand new hi-tech sensors along the shore of Esthwaite Water and Cunsey Beck, which flow into Lake Windermere. The devices are able to measure the water for a number of different factors, all at the same time. These include organic material, bacteria, ammonia, nutrients such as phosphorus, water temperature and levels of oxygen. These parameters together give us a level of insight that we've never had before, and are a good indication of the health of a lake or river at a given time.
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	●	Our EDM report for 2023 showed that average spills per monitored overflow had reduced by 24% compared to the 2020 baseline. This was as a result of investment in storm overflows to reduce frequency of operation and improved data processes. Record breaking rainfall in 2023 – when some parts of the region experienced their wettest ever July – and increased monitoring meant that more spills were recorded in 2023 compared to 2022 but still less than our baseline year. As set out in this report, we are proposing a substantial investment programme to reduce storm overflow operation, and we've made an early start.
Reduce category 1-3 pollution incidents by at least 50% by 2025 against a 2012 baseline.	●	During 2023, 216 category 1 to 3 pollution incidents occurred. While the extraordinarily heavy rainfall we experienced this year did have an impact on our pollution performance, we continue to deliver a sustained reduction in pollution incidents and remain committed to minimising our environmental impact.

Key: ● Initiative started ● Making progress ● Good progress ● Completed/ achieved

Pledge 1

Ensuring our operations progressively reduce impact to river health

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Aim for no pollution incidents from our assets		While we aimed for no serious incidents, in June 2023 there was a burst on the outfall pipe at Fleetwood Wastewater Treatment Works, carrying cleaned water out to sea. This affected how much cleaned water could leave the site, reducing its treatment capacity. Because of the difficulty repairing the burst pipe, located some nine metres underground, and its effect on the treatment process, we invoked our incident management processes to minimise the impact to local watercourses and bathing waters. We installed a temporary 2,000-metre long overland bypass pipe and optimised capacity across the wastewater network to manage flows into the treatment works. A fleet of tankers was used throughout the operation to remove more than 3,000,000 litres of sewage from the Fleetwood system each day. Once the burst was repaired and the works returned to its normal capacity, we held public drop-in sessions along the Fylde coast to explain what had happened and to discuss any concerns from local people.
Recruit over 100 green apprentices by 2025		We are well on track to surpass this commitment as we currently have 143 apprentices in place across each of our 11 green apprenticeship pathways. By September 2024, we project that number will increase to 162, taking us well beyond our target of 100 green apprentices by 2025.

Key: Initiative started · Making progress · Good progress · Completed/ achieved

Case study:

Monitoring our overflows

We are pleased to report that 100% of the 2,264 storm overflows across the North West are now fitted with an event duration monitor (EDM). EDMs record when and for how long a storm overflow discharges to the environment. We now have visibility of the performance of all our storm overflows.

EDM data from each water company operating in England is reported to the Environment Agency and published by it each year.

Our 2023 data return showed that reported spills increased by 40% in the North West, compared to the previous year. As well increased visibility provided by the full suite of EDMs, there are other very clear reasons for this increase. As declared by the Met Office, 2023 was one of the wettest years on record and parts of the North West experienced an increase in rainfall of over 50%. It was the wettest year since 1995 and the wettest July on record in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. Ten named storms occurred in the year.

With 54% of the region's sewer network being combined (compared to an average of 33% in the rest of the country) the storm overflows operated as they are designed to do during times of heavy rainfall to prevent homes, gardens and businesses from flooding.

Despite this, we do not accept this status quo where contaminated rainfall reaches the water environment and we are determined to re-plumb the North West to ensure that the system works differently. We have proposed to invest some £3.1 billion to reduce overflow activation.

We launched our live online storm overflow portal, which shows in near real time when overflows are operating. This is another important step in being transparent about our operations and our commitment to improving the situation.

Pledge 2

Being open and transparent about our performance and our plans

2

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Provide greater transparency on the link between environmental performance and remuneration	●	Our executive pay arrangements are aligned to our purpose, vision and strategy, thereby incentivising great customer service and the creation of long-term value for all. In the remuneration section of our 2024 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% of reward is linked to customer service and environmental performance and this was strengthened in 2022/23 with every employee having a target to deliver our Better Rivers plan.
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	●	We published our first Storm Overflows Report in 2022 which set out our plans to tackle the most frequently spilling storm overflows.
Environmental Performance Committee to be established in September 2022	●	The North West's independent challenge group for water, YourVoice, scrutinises our environmental work. The terms of reference for its environmental subgroup were revised in 2022 for it to take on a formal role in tracking the delivery of our Better Rivers plan and challenging us on progress.
Work with stakeholders to provide the information people want and need in anannual report on storm overflows from 2022. Public commentary on our progress on improved monitoring to go into the APR	●	In 2022, we published a Storm Overflows Report to explain the challenges and opportunities connected to overflows and reducing how frequently they operate. In particular, the report described what causes overflows to operate more frequently and what we are doing to tackle this. Last year, we shared our first Better Rivers report, providing an update on progress in delivering the 29 commitments made under our Better Rivers: Better North West plan. These documents can be found on our **Better Rivers website**. In our statement of overall company performance (our **Annual Performance Report**, or APR), we added additional content to describe our plans to reduce the impact of storm overflow activations.

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Ensure all storm overflows are monitored by 2023	●	100% of the 2,264 storm overflows we have in the North West region are now fitted with an EDM (event duration monitor), giving us the best ever visibility of our storm overflow performance.
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.	●	We published a new online map to help inform the public who use the region's rivers, lakes and seas for recreation. It shows the location of all the storm overflows in the North West, indicating in near real time whether or not they are currently releasing storm water.
Hold Environmental AGM in 2022 to review performance and progress	●	In 2022, we held our first Environmental AGM, chaired by the environmental lead for the region's independent challenge group for water, YourVoice. 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. It provided stakeholders with the opportunity to ask directors about the company's environmental performance. Participants included local nature partnerships, wildlife trusts, river trusts, combined authorities and other environmental stakeholders and over 30 environmental champions joined the session. In 2023, we continued engagement with customers and stakeholders through a series of 'Your water, your say' sessions, where questions were put to members of our executive team on many topics, including environmental performance and storm overflows. Responses to all the questions posed in each session can be found **here** on our website.
Bring the bright minds of our colleagues and partners together to investigate storm overflow activations and collaborate on innovative solutions	●	We have made an early start to reduce storm overflow activations and at some of the high-spilling sites in Cumbria, deploying several solutions at a quick pace to reduce spills. Increasing treatment capacity at these sites through the installation of side-stream treatment facilities, ahead of designated AMP8 solutions, has seen storm overflow spills at one site reduce from more than 340 in 2022 to just nine between September 2023 and the year end. This innovative approach is driving significant results and will be rolled out at additional sites in the coming months.

Key: ● Initiative started ● Making progress ● Good progress ● Completed/ achieved

Pledge 3

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

3

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Use our convening powers to help others address their contribution to river health		Tackling the issues that impact river water quality takes a multi-agency approach. We can effect a lot of change and we are making an early start on what we can do. In addition, we're working extensively with others such as businesses, local authorities and grass roots community groups to identify how we can best support them to make their contribution to improving river water quality. Our stakeholder management team is taking a county-based approach to building relationships with key stakeholders, urging them to act alongside us. Our recently launched Better Rivers community fund is supporting local community-based groups with a desire to improve their local watercourses and surrounding environments, through the supply of equipment and materials to keep local river environments clean and accessible for all.
Convene a North West Rivers Summit in 2022		In partnership with the Rivers Trust, we hosted the North West's first Future Rivers Forum in 2022 to drive awareness and address the challenges that rivers face throughout the region including climate change, population growth and pollution. It brought together 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.
In 2022, launch a new partnership to protect watercourses with farmers to incentivise farming practices that reduce impact		Our Farmer's Fund, launched at our inaugural Future Rivers Forum, set aside £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.
Plant over 1 million trees by 2030		Since the start of AMP7 we've planted more than 500,000 trees across the region. We've been working to identify further suitable locations for tree planting, considering the appropriate species mixes and planting densities, as we continue to work towards our target for 2030.
100% of our SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) in favourable or recovering status by 2030		Currently, 91% of SSSIs in our region are in favourable or recovering condition. We have strategies in place to ensure that all of the SSSIs on our land are in favourable or recovering status by 2030. We are on track to meet this target and will work with Natural England as they complete their review into assessment criteria until 2028.

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
From 2023, create a movement of North West citizen scientists to collect data on river health		We recognise the increasingly important role Citizen Science plays in understanding, enhancing and supporting our rivers and catchments. We support, through our co-leadership of the CaSTCo programme, a Community Fund and increasingly thorough employee engagement activity. CaSTCo (Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative), led by United Utilities and The Rivers Trust, brings together more than 30 organisations including water companies, communities, local partnerships, technical experts and academics. Backed by Ofwat's Innovation Fund, this £7 million programme is exploring how we help make our rivers more resilient by putting people and communities at the heart, utilising and sharing data to help influence key decision makers and take action where needed to drive environmental improvements. All these organisations are collaborating to pilot ideas and solutions at eight trial locations across the country. In the North West, the Mersey Rivers Trust, supported by the Ribble and Lune Rivers Trusts, are leading the way, engaging United Utilities and dozens of other organisations, working with 130 Citizen Scientist volunteers and anglers, testing sampling kits and measuring biodiversity metrics on fish captures. The Trust has also been keeping the community engaged through the Big River Watch and Bio Blitz, encouraging communities to engage with their local rivers and share what they see, helping to make them much more informed about the water environment. The Community Fund, launched in 2023, focuses on providing much needed tools and equipment – from waders and slip matts to water quality sampling kits e.g. hannu checkers – to grass roots organisations focused on local rivers and water courses. This funding helps stimulate and maintain engagement amongst Citizen Science communities by removing the barriers to on-going participation. Many of our employees are already engaged with their local catchments. By highlighting the important role that Citizen Science plays within these catchments we encourage more of our colleagues to take the plunge and volunteer in their local communities.
Fund local universities and research studies to understand river health		We continue to work closely with national and regional Rivers Trusts and co-lead the Defra funded CaSTCo project. This aims to deliver a national standardised framework of catchment monitoring methods to drive improved decision making and better understand river health. In addition to supporting at a national level, we work closely with the likes of the Ribble and Mersey Rivers Trusts supporting 'BioBlitz' biological surveying activity, reed bed planting and methodology trials in these important catchments. Our support extends all the way to innovation, testing new monitoring technology to ensure we maintain our momentum for better rivers.

Key: Initiative started · Making progress · Good progress · Completed/ achieved

Pledge 3

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

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Substantial update to be published regarding developments of partnerships with (1) National and Local Rivers Trust and (2) GMCA and EA	●	As described in the previous section, we are making good progress with the Rivers Trust through CaSTCo (Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative), which is led by ourselves and The Rivers Trust. In June 2023, we co-launched the Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) for Greater Manchester, endorsed by its Mayor Andy Burnham. In a UK first, the plan aims to ensure sustainable water management is applied holistically across the city region to enhance water quality, manage flood risk and increase biodiversity to benefit people, places and prosperity. There are seven workstreams within the plan and we are making good progress in the delivery of our actions.
In 2023, launch a Community Fund to support groups to improve our rivers	●	At the end of 2023, we launched our inaugural Better Rivers community fund and have been actively promoting the fund through our stakeholder partnerships and within our public communications. The fund is gathering pace and to date, within just five months, we have had interest from almost 20 grassroots community groups with passion for keeping their local river environments clean and accessible. Through the fund we have provided items such as litter picking equipment, water sampling materials and gardening tools to help local groups create better conditions within their local river environments.
Work with partners Rivers Trust, RSPB and local authorities to deliver projects	●	Working in partnership allows us to accomplish more and we recognise that we cannot change the water environment on our own. Our long association with the RSPB has more recently benefited from our joint vision – “Good for Water, Good for Nature, Good for People” – providing renewed focus, re-energising our relationship and providing the impetus for continued collaboration to deliver projects in Haweswater in the north of the region through to Dove Stone further south. Irrespective of location, this partnership enables us to enhance the biodiversity that the land supports, build landscape resilience to climate change and other impacts such as flood and fire risk. By managing the land in an environmentally sustainable way, we improve water quality, create an environment visitors enjoy and contribute to the sustainability of local communities. Our desire to tackle challenges through a more collaborative approach extends to our work with local authorities. In a first partnership of its kind we’ve collaborated with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Environment Agency to create an Integrated Water Management Plan to look at how we manage water across Greater Manchester. By working collaboratively, the partnership will deliver progressive improvements in sustainable water management, enhancing the natural environment, ensuring all future developments and critical infrastructure are resilient to the impact of climate change.

Key: Initiative started · Making progress · Good progress · Completed/ achieved

3

Case study:

River Rangers making a difference

Working with others is key to bringing about the improvements we all want to see in our region’s rivers and waterways.

This past year we’ve bolstered our team of River Rangers and we’re proud to say we now have teams covering the north and south of the region. They carry out a range of activities including regular inspection of our assets and maintain river environments through litter picking, taking water samples and working closely with organisations such as The Rivers Trust to strengthen those partnerships that deliver benefits to our rivers.

In local communities this year, the Rangers have supported Love River Irk, the Radcliffe Litter Pickers and Salford community groups during their litter picking events. They’ve taken part in beach cleans in Wyre, Fleetwood and West Cumbria.

During periods of heavy rainfall, the teams routinely check our assets to ensure they’re operating effectively and carry out clearance work to remove blockages from drainage points.

Their close connection to communities has provided a brilliant opportunity to promote our recently launched Better Rivers community fund through which we’re supporting local groups to improve local river environments. Through the fund we’ve donated equipment to litter picking groups, to groups taking water samples and those clearing riverbanks of invasive vegetation.

We’re receiving increasing numbers of requests for support through the fund, the case studies for which are available on our Better Rivers website and we look forward to working closely with more and more local groups in this way.

Our role in the Love Windermere partnership continues – the most significant multi-sector stakeholder partnership set up to tackle water quality challenges in the lake. It’s now delivering on its science-based plan, which is fed by a number of citizen science-based projects that collect water samples from the lake. Our Rangers provide support to such initiatives.

On a larger scale, our Rangers have been involved with the CaSTCo (Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative), led by United Utilities and The Rivers Trust, which is also helping to make our rivers more resilient by putting people and communities at the heart, utilising and sharing data to help influence key decision makers and take action where needed to drive improvements.

Through the programme, there are eight trial locations across the country, where volunteers and anglers are using testing sampling kits, measuring biodiversity metrics on fish capture and water quality.

Pledge 3

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

3

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
Catalyse our network of colleague volunteers to focus on river health		All colleagues are given the opportunity to volunteer up to three days per year with an environmental community partner. Over the last year, colleagues have accompanied our team of River Rangers at community events and river-themed activities, interacting with members of the public and working alongside organisations such as The Rivers Trust.
Advocate for the removal of the automatic right to connect		We advocate for the removal of the automatic right to connect under section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991. This change is essential for promoting sustainable water management practices in all new development to help protect our rivers and natural environment. By eliminating this automatic right we can reduce the risk of surface water from new developments being discharged into foul and combined sewers and either requiring treatment or, if the sewers are full, discharging into the local water environment.
Champion legislation to ban wet wipes that contain plastic and lobby for a ban on all wet wipes that are not 'Fine to Flush'		We've continued to engage nationally with manufacturers and with Water UK regarding wet wipes, specifically around the manufacture of plastic-free products and the appropriate disposal of these items. We've also supported Water UK by providing representation on an International Standards Organisation (ISO) working group. The group is developing 'flush-ability' testing and labelling standards. We welcome the UK Government's recent announcement on the ban of wipes containing plastics and hope to see future activity that encourages manufacturers and retailers to do all they can to discourage inappropriate disposal of waste products into our sewers.

Key: Initiative started · Making progress · Good progress · Completed/ achieved

Pledge 4

Creating more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways

Commitment status dashboard

Commitment:	Status:	Progress:
In 2030, 95% of customers will be no further than 30 miles from a bathing water		Through our AMP8 water industry national environment programme (WINEP) development, we've identified 21 lakes and rivers that have potential interest for bathing. We've contacted local stakeholders (councils, recreational clubs, and landowners) to understand the appetite for waters currently used for recreation to be designated. Feedback identified concerns around complex land ownership, health and safety implications and the consequences of designation on site management. We're now reviewing next steps.
Play our part in creating and promoting additional inland bathing waters in the North West		We're ready to deliver water quality interventions for proposed bathing waters at Edisford Bridge on the River Ribble and at Coniston Water, if they are designated by Defra.
Work with others to create ten new recreational clubs at our reservoirs for all our customers to enjoy by 2030		Following our pilot in 2022, stand-up paddle boarding is now available at 11 reservoirs provided by recreational clubs that have undergone health and safety assessments. See our case study for more details.

Key: Initiative started | Making progress | Good progress | Completed/ achieved

Case study:

Extending opportunities for 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. With several recreational clubs approaching us wanting to include stand-up paddle boarding as part of their water sports licence on our reservoirs, we carried out a pilot in 2022 to review safety elements of stand-up paddle boarding.

Following that trial, stand-up paddle boarding is now available at 11 reservoirs provided by recreational clubs that have undergone health and safety assessments. Paddle boarding that isn't part of a club licence is not permitted at any reservoir.

The new sites are:

- Glossop/Torside
- Errwood
- Watergrove (West Pennine)
- Clowbridge (Rossendale)
- Spade Mill
- Delph

This is in addition to the existing five sites, where paddle boarding was already part of an existing sailing club licence:

- Fishmoor
- Lower Rivington
- High Rid
- Jumbles
- Hollingworth Lake

We're continuing to explore further sites for new recreational clubs.

Looking ahead

Our proposals for the five-year investment period from 2025 to 2030, known as AMP8, would see us deliver one of the most ambitious infrastructure investment programme of its kind. It would bring huge reductions in spills from storm overflows, preventing contaminated rainfall from entering our region's waterways – the change we all want to see.

By 2025:
Accelerated solutions at 29 sites across Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester

By 2030:
437 storm overflows will be upgraded, giving us a 60% reduction in activations across the decade to 2030

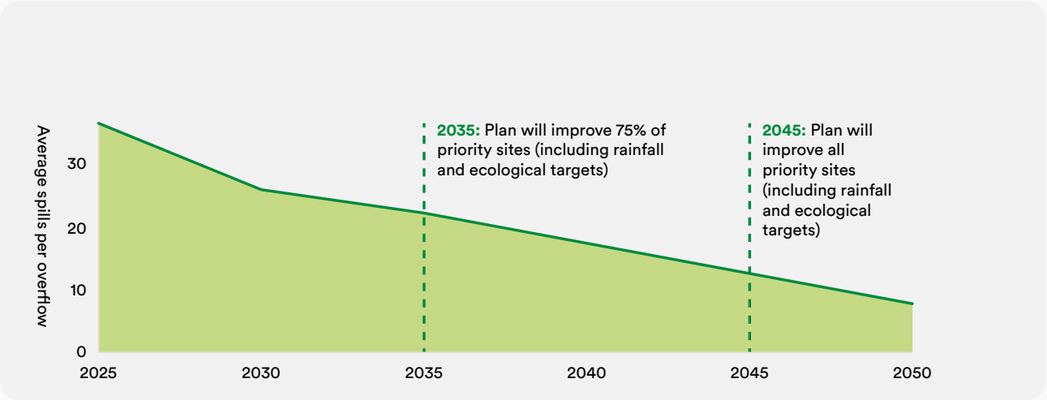
2024 → 2050

By autumn 2024
We will deploy rapid solutions to 29 sites across Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester

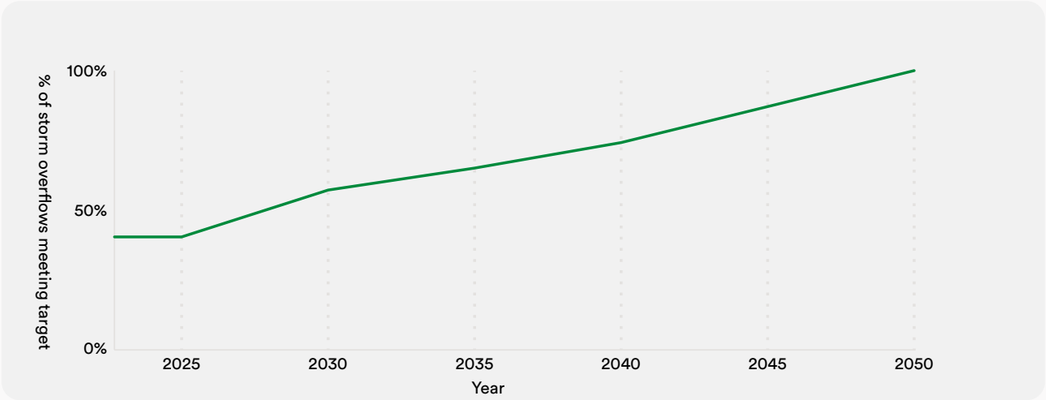
2025 to 2030:
£3.1 billion proposed investment to reduce spills from storm overflows

2050:
No more than ten spills per year on average at each of the 2,264 storm overflows in the North West

The annual average number of spills will reduce to meet the target in the Government's storm overflows discharge reduction plan, where overflows will not be permitted to discharge above an average of ten rainfall events per year by 2050.



100% of storm overflows are predicted to meet annual spill target by 2050.



Visit our Better Rivers website at
unitedutilities.com/better-rivers

United Utilities

Water for the North West