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# Appendix

## YKY06\_Supporting Customers in Circumstances of Vulnerability



YorkshireWater

# Navigating this document



**This Appendices document is separate to and supports the main business plan document.**

## Links outside of this report

### Read more links

This icon can be clicked on to link to any further documents or resources outside of this report



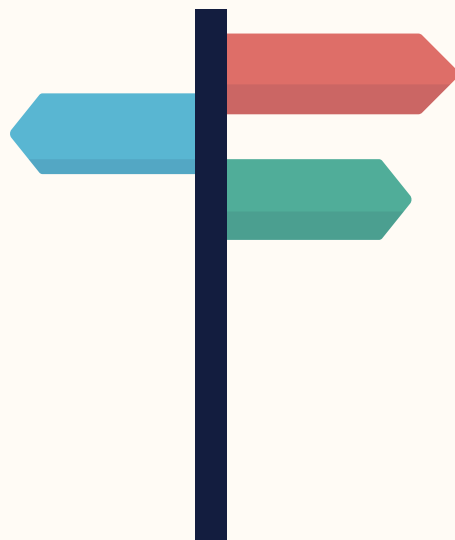
Read more about this at [websiteaddress.com](#) or link

### Business plan links

This icon can be clicked on to go to the main Yorkshire Water Business Plan document where more information can be found.



More detail on this subject can be found in **Chapter 1: Government / Regulatory Priorities and Targets**



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# Supporting Customers in Circumstances of Vulnerability

## 1.1 Introduction

Providing excellent service to all our customers is incredibly important. We want to ensure that regardless of individual needs, all customers feel supported and know that additional help is available. We will ensure that all our services are accessible and require minimal customer effort, especially to those with additional needs or finding themselves in vulnerable circumstances. These circumstances may be due to a change in financial situation, medical need (permanent or temporary), specific characteristic, disability or life circumstance. We will ensure we have services available to support each of these customers.

We will provide this through three key approaches:

- **Identifying and reaching customers who need extra help** – We will ensure that we are visible and accessible to all customers, enhancing our communication and promoting available help, so that customers are aware of exactly where they can access the right support for them when they need it.
- **Super easy journeys for everyone** – We will help eligible customers access bill reduction options and priority services as quickly and easily as possible via multiple channels, including through our online application process. We will simplify the online application process to make eligibility more transparent.



More detail about the financial support available can be found in [Chapter 2: Bills and affordability](#)

- **Priority Services for customers who need additional support** – through greater insight into our communities and customers, we will design and deliver services to meet the diverse range of our customers' needs, including but not limited to our Priority Services Register.

## Identifying and reaching customers in circumstances of vulnerability

We need to be visible and accessible to customers at their time of need. A key challenge to providing extra help to customers is reaching customers who need support at the time they need it. Despite undertaking a diverse range of awareness raising activities since 2020, we know from industry research (**Cost of Living Research, Ofwat 2023**) and our own customer insight that awareness of bill support and the Priority Services Register remains at approximately a third of customers. Of those customers who are aware, there is often a view that the help on offer wouldn't be available to them.



More detail on our customer research can be found in [Chapter 6: Affordability and Vulnerability study](#)

Within this plan we aim to increase awareness and provide transparency about eligibility. We will do this through targeted promotion of the breadth of extra support we have available to customers and ensure it is reaching the right customers who are most likely to need it. By building in to our plan a diverse approach to promotional activity we aim to respond to customer research which suggests messages received multiple times are more likely to be recalled ([Trust & Perceptions report, Ofwat 2023](#)). This approach builds on our existing promotional activity across a wide variety of channels; social media platforms; on bills – including the envelope; verbally during contact with customers; and on marketing materials; – but also includes exploring new promotional activity such as increased email communication and providing visibility within the Yorkshire Water online account.

In addition, we aim to be more proactive in providing customers with the extra help we have available based on the knowledge we have, or obtain, about our customers. Maximising data sharing with external organisations to understand our customers and their potential needs is a key element. Examples of how this will benefit our customers include;

- Maximising the embedded data sharing of PSR customers with the energy sector as there are approximately 900,000 PSR registrants with Northern PowerGrid across Yorkshire and the Northeast. In the coming year, based on current sharing guidance, we aim to have shared approximately 10,000 customers with the distribution network operators across our region. This is expected to significantly increase when energy suppliers data can also be shared with the water industry which is due in 2024.
- Further utilisation of data sharing with the Department of Work & Pensions to verify customer eligibility for bill reduction schemes. This aims to enable customers to be added to Watersure and our social tariff, WaterSupport, without needing to provide personal information or verifying eligibility. In 2023-24 we aim to utilise this eligibility checking to support approximately 25,000 customers and forecast to maintain this moving forward. This will increase the number of customers receiving financial help as well as make the customer journey simple and efficient.

## Community Engagement

We will also ensure that we are visible where our customers need us to be by increasing our Community Engagement activity. This will be specifically focussed on reaching and providing support to customers in vulnerable circumstances. Based on feedback from our customers and stakeholders we will build on our current successful activity with partners and expand them further. This includes empowering more organisations across our region to be able to provide customers with Yorkshire Water's bill support and access to the Priority Services Register on our behalf.



Read more about this at  
[Inclusive Service PC research](#)

By 2030 we aim to double the number of customers currently accessing our additional support via our partner organisations. In 2022-23 over 12,000 customers were provided support from Yorkshire Water via an external organisation, such as debt charities, housing organisations and councils. This provided customers with over £2m bill savings during that financial year. Our commitment to working in partnership helps raise the profile of the support available and makes the application processes smoother and more efficient for both customers and the company.

We will also deliver this growth by continuing to utilise data mapping to analyse which geographical areas and customer segments are under-represented in receiving our support. By doing so we will target our community engagement and promotional activity to increase our reach with these customer segments. This ensures we are targeting our activity and resources as efficiently and effectively as possible for our customers.

### 1.2 Super easy customer journeys for everyone

Our aim is to help customers access bill reduction options as simply and as quickly as possible. Customers tell us that they find the application process for our support simple. Our research shows that this increases customer satisfaction and engagement with our support.

Our registration process is consistent across contact channels including online; over the phone, traditional paper forms, and via external organisations who can apply on the customer's behalf. For those customers who speak to us directly, or to one of our partner organisations, we can usually confirm the support provided there and then. For applicants for a financial support scheme, this will usually also include the customer's new bill amount and payment plan, where applicable. This removes barriers for customers to be able to access support, as well as providing instant reassurance.

Our customer service culture extends across our business-as-usual billing processes that ensure customers are receiving regular and accurate bills to mitigate affordability concerns. For example;

- customers are alerted when high consumption is identified at their property;
- we proactively contact customers if their new metered charges are not lower than their previous rateable value and will revert them to their previous unmeasured charges;
- we embed budget plan reviews within the billing system to prevent future bill shock.

These processes represent just a few of the ways we ensure that customers are treated fairly and surpass minimum expectations of Paying Fair guidance.

However, we want to build on this success. In this plan we will review and update our online application process for the PSR and financial support schemes. Customers tell us that they would welcome more transparent eligibility criteria for financial support and clear understanding of what services are available. Therefore, we aim to make it even simpler for customers to apply by making our services and eligibility even more transparent throughout the registration process. This includes updating our website and providing an online application form that can present the services that customers are likely to be eligible for or benefit from. This aims to support customers in understanding when they may be able to access help and remove any barriers that prevents engagement.



Read more about this at [Affordability & Vulnerability research](#)

### 1.3 Priority Services for customers who need additional support

Knowing our region, communities and customers is really important to us and enables us to adapt and design our services accordingly. For example, knowing that one in five of our customers are recognised as disabled under the Disability Act may suggest that they could require different support during an incident. Similarly, knowing 7% of the region do not speak English at all or not 'very well' could suggest these customers will require our translation service or communication in a different format.

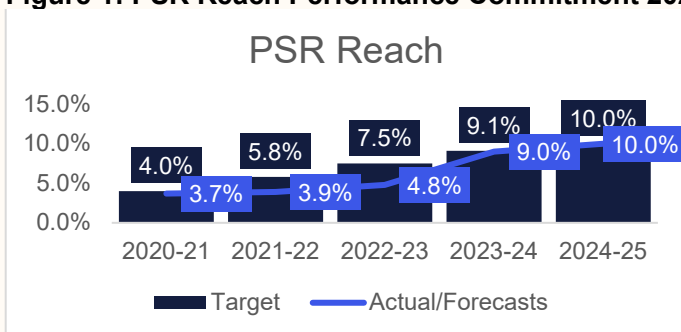


More detail on this subject can be found in [Chapter 6: Customers](#)

Using our breadth of customer insight enables us to strive to ensure our services are designed with all circumstances in mind and that they are tailored and accessible to all. Equally, we recognise that not all customers in these circumstances will require extra help and, as such, strive to ensure that all our core services are accessible as standard. However, we'll ensure priority services are visible to all who may need them so that our customers can make the choice that is right for them.

Visibility of the additional support we have available, and customers engaging with these services, has been a key challenge during the current price review period. This is reflected in the performance of the PSR Reach Performance Commitment up to 2022-23.

**Figure 1: PSR Reach Performance Commitment 2020-2025**



However, as graph 1 shows, we are on track to deliver our targeted performance by 2025. We aim to overcome the existing challenge of engagement by being more proactive in our approach to including customers on to the PSR based on segmentation. One such example is including all households where we know residents are over the age of 85 on to our PSR for bottled water delivery should there be a water outage incident. Our research suggests that this customer segment are less likely to be aware of, or sign up for the PSR, but are likely to require support should an incident occur.



Read more about this at  
[Inclusive Service research](#)

As such, by 2025 our PSR will support over 220,000 customers across the region with a wide variety of services, including but not limited to – bottled water delivery; bills and communication in alternative formats, e.g. audio and braille; and account passwords for security and reassurance when engaging with Yorkshire Water colleagues.

Beyond our specific PSR services, we also offer customers a variety of other support which is not included in our Performance Commitment measures. For example; we provide online accounts for customers to obtain their bills digitally for increased accessibility using technology; we tailor collections processes for customers where data suggests there is a potential vulnerable circumstance (which includes increased proactive communication and potential doorstep visits to offer help schemes); ReciteMe and British Sign Language is available on our website; and signposting to external support, such as mental health services, when customers need it. These services support a significant number of customers – many of which are not registered on our PSR – and stretch beyond our licence conditions or regulatory guidelines. This demonstrates our commitment to supporting customers beyond our direct services or target measures.

### Customer Satisfaction

Based on customer research, our PSR services are seen positively by registered customers with 79% of those receiving a service being 'satisfied', and almost 50% rating the services 10/10.



Read more about this at  
[Affordability & Vulnerability research](#)

We aim to learn and build on this positive customer feedback by reviewing, improving and expanding the priority services we provide. This will include a review of all our PSR service definitions to ensure they are transparent to customers and meet their needs, updating our website based on customer feedback and learnings. These are key examples of how we are engaging with customers directly to ensure we are inclusive by design.

We also want to ensure that our customer data remains up to date. We have embedded clear data checking activities across our operational processes to ensure we are providing the services that our customers need and benefit from. These processes include on contact with customers, during which colleagues across Yorkshire Water will check that customers are receiving all the services they require and update our data if needed. In addition, we have outbound processes, via multiple channels, embedded into our operation. This includes text, phone and email correspondence to customers on the PSR to check they still require the services they are registered for. These processes ensure that we are transparent with customers as to the services they are registered to receive, as well as ensure that these services are accurate and up to date.