



# County Water Vulnerability Strategy 2026

## Introduction

County Water is licensed by the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) to provide wastewater removal and treatment services at Heyford Park since April 2018 and currently we service approximately 1500 residents.

We're part of the Dorchester Group which was founded in 1996 and has become one of the UK's leading and most successful property investment and development companies, specialising in the successful regeneration of many landmark projects – including Heyford Park.

The County Water team is focused on, and committed to, providing you with the best possible, efficient, effective and environmentally friendly service and best value. To achieve that, we bring fresh thinking and innovation to what we do with wastewater, to provide you with a continuously improving offering.

Much of what we do is set down in government legislation and regulation. However, we strive to go far beyond those stringent requirements to be as cost effective, easy to deal with and highly responsive as possible to your needs, as we work to provide you with a wastewater system that simply works.

This document outlines our strategy in respect of vulnerable customers. It has been shaped through discussions with Consumer Council for Water, review of best practice in the industry with other NAVs, discussions with customers and discussions with our local social landlords. We define Vulnerable Customers as those who need extra help.

## Direct Approach

County Water has its Head Office at Heyford Park, in the heart of the community it serves. It is embedded with the other services at Heyford Park through its joint management company (Heyford Park Management Company Limited) which also manages the landlord services (residential and commercial). This ensures efficient data sharing and customer service across all areas.

This means that we have regular contact with all our customers, we know them as members of the community and are able to adapt to their needs in ways that an impersonal national operator would not be able to.



Heyford Park has a high degree of home ownership and so financial hardship is generally limited to those in affordable housing. We have strong links to each of the four Housing Associations who operate at Heyford Park and therefore we are well placed to support those most in need.

Amongst the other residents at Heyford Park we are aware that there may be other vulnerabilities and our team are alert to ensure that all our customers have access to services appropriate to their needs.

### **Additional Help and Support**

We are agile to be able to respond to customer's needs in many ways, including:

- Offering a face-to-face service for those who find communication by phone or email difficult
- Making arrangements for billing through a trusted contact such as a friend or family member
- Using landlord representatives from our local housing associations to help assist or mediate with customers
- Agreeing payment plans with customers struggling with their bills and coordinating these with landlords where appropriate.

We write to our social landlords (four currently active at Heyford Park) to assist us in identifying vulnerable customers. We ensure that their community officers/property managers are aware of County Water's SewageSupport and WaterSure schemes and use their networks to ensure that we have the best opportunity to support our customers.

Our onsite presence meaning that any customers can discuss any issues with us directly at any time. We have sent out printed information regarding the schemes and option we offer for the specific needs of vulnerable residents, and we plan to repeat this annually. We have also updated our website to offer digital access to our Priority Services information and registration.



## **Handling Data**

We use a variety of communication channels for customers to contact us, including email, phone, letter or through our website.

We do not currently have a data sharing agreement with the incumbent water provider at Heyford Park, Thames Water, which is our current biggest challenge. However, we are in ongoing discussions to enter into one to enable a “tell us once” service around vulnerable customers.

We are always mindful of the need to ensure data shared with us is handled in accordance with our data handling policy. We have robust policies in place and provide regular training to staff on handling sensitive data.

## **Future Targets**

This strategy will remain in place for the next 3 years and will be reported annually via our annual performance report which will be published on our website. We will continue to work with stakeholders to listen to feedback and continually improve our approach. Our main priorities are:

- - To increase awareness of the help and support available to customers through our website, mailshots, billing templates and new account holder initial letters with information on our priority services.
  - To advise residents that they can access the WaterSure, Priority Services Register and SewageSupport schemes

## **Comments and Feedback**

We welcome any comments or feedback on our strategy from residents face to face, by post at our offices at 52 Camp Road, OX25 5HD, by email to [accounts@countywater.co.uk](mailto:accounts@countywater.co.uk) or by phone on 0333 3208 656.



## **Appendix 1 Ofwat Vulnerability guidance**

### **Ofwat Minimum Expectation**

### **County Water's Response**

#### **Objective 1 – High standards of service and support**

1.1: Companies should adapt their services to customers in line with any known extra help needs. This is especially important during times where there is increased risk of harm, for example, during incidents.

We maintain an electronic database of customers through our property management system which integrates across all of our services at Heyford Park. We know our customers well through these combined services and staff are aware of any additional needs.

1.2: Companies should ensure that the level and nature of support available to customers is presented in a way customers can understand.

We always use simple language in our documents and on our website and regularly review the content. We have added details of Watersure and the Sewage Support Scheme. We offer alternative options on request.

1.3: Companies should seek to continuously improve the service they provide to customers who need extra help. This may include finding innovative ways to design or implement services.

We continuously invite feedback as part of our role in the community and to improve services to customers. We have updated our website to add more information on the schemes we offer specifically for vulnerable residents.

1.4: Companies should use a range of data to monitor the effectiveness of their extra help services, and the satisfaction levels of customers who have made such needs known.

We work closely with our customers and ensure that any issues or recommendations are addressed in a timely manner.

#### **Objective 2 – Inclusive by design**

2.1: Companies should interact with customers in a way that is inclusive for a diverse range of audiences. This should be underpinned by relevant

We work with our customers to ensure that they have different methods of communication available to them. We also monitor industry best practice



insights, which may include research, engagement, and accreditation.

2.2: Companies should offer their customers a range of ways to interact and communicate. This includes allowing customers to opt for third party billing where appropriate.

2.3: Companies should consult with CCW, and engage with stakeholders and other customer representatives, when making significant changes to their proposed service offering around vulnerability.

### **Objective 3 – Identifying customers**

3.1: Companies should take active steps to identify customers who require extra help who have not yet been identified.

3.2: Companies should take steps to proactively increase customer

At County Water customers can contact us through many methods – face to face, post, email or phone, and we are developing our capabilities to ensure our customers have a choice in the way they can contact us. We do not currently offer third party billing options.

We engage with the CCW (Consumer Council for Water) local housing associations and our community liaison groups to seek feedback on our vulnerability strategy. We will continue to listen to these groups and consider any changes needed in the future.

We provide details of our services to all new customers as they move into their homes on our networks, including how they can find out more about what is available for vulnerable residents. Customers are made aware on our website and in regular invoices of options to assist with payment and how to register for additional support. We have updated this information pack for those moving into our Housing Association properties to include details of the SewageSupport, PSR, and WaterSure schemes.

Customers are made aware on our website and in regular communications of options to assist with payment and



awareness of the extra help available to those who need it.

3.3: Companies should train their staff to spot potential requirements for extra help, even when a customer has not previously declared it.

3.4: Companies should actively consider how they can reduce communication burdens on customers who need extra help; this could include establishing data sharing arrangements with partner organisations.

#### **Objective 4 - Recording needs**

4.1: Companies should take appropriate steps to record customers' extra help needs. These records should be held securely and in line with wider data protection requirements.

4.2: Companies' records should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.

4.3: Companies should consider how their records of customers' needs can be designed in a way that can help deliver wider benefits to their customers; for example, reducing communication burdens for customers through data sharing.

how to register for additional support. This is also highlighted in our invoicing and when statements are sent to customers in arrears.

As part of our communication through landlords, particularly social landlords, staff are aware of signs which may indicate that additional support is needed and are aware of how to offer this support with sensitivity.

We are working with the incumbent water company, Thames Water, to enter into a data sharing agreement to improve communication with customers. We already share information with local social landlords.

All data is safely stored in our property management system.

The property management system ensure that data is maintained consistently with all our partners and regularly updated should customer circumstances change.

We are working with the incumbent water company, Thames Water, to enter into a data sharing agreement to improve communication with customers. This would reduce the communication burden for customers.



We already work closely with local social landlords on information sharing.

4.4: In designing their approach to recording and, where relevant, sharing customer vulnerability data, companies should clearly explain to customers how their data will be used, including any choices available to them. Companies should take steps to understand how their customers who need extra help feel about the use of their data.

We provide clear information to customers on how we use their data and the reason we are holding it. We have a responsibility under GDPR to keep customer data safe. We have robust procedures in place for how data is stored and handled, and training for staff.

#### **Objective 5 – Vulnerability strategies**

5.1: Companies should develop and maintain a vulnerability strategy setting out how they plan to support the extra help needs of their customer base.

We have developed our vulnerability strategy in various ways: We have added forms and information to our website; we have sent out communications to all residents and contacted the respective housing associations served by County Water

5.2: Companies should take steps to understand the likely underlying requirements for extra help in their areas.

We will continue to engage with customers, landlords, housing associations, and charities to better understand the diverse needs of our customers.