

Our progress

Our journey of delivering better outcomes for our customers and becoming a more resilient organisation.

Resilience is at the centre of our strategy to become brilliant at the basics while transforming key areas of our business. We believe there is a substantial opportunity to adopt a more integrated approach to the way that we deliver our services over the 2020–25 period; using systems thinking to look at the bigger picture, and how we might collaborate with our peers and other industries to deliver joint solutions to some of our bigger challenges.

→ Read more about our **operational performance** on pages 74 to 99

Improving our operational performance

A number of key Strategic Projects delivering improvements in network digitalisation, logistics and asset maintenance were agreed by the Southern Water Board in 2020, and programmes to deliver them are now being driven by a new Head of Strategic Projects.

Asset maintenance

Now, more than ever before, we need to make sure that the assets we build and the infrastructure we install is sustainable, in terms of the source of the materials used, their longevity and ultimate impact on the environment. It is not just our capital construction schemes that need this attention; we also need to make sure that we are carrying out routine maintenance in the most sustainable and efficient way.

Logistics

Our area of operation stretches across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight so efficient logistics, ensuring our field teams have access to the right kit, when they need it, is critical. We are looking at a number of initiatives in this area, including a repair call line for teams.

Digitalisation

This programme will specifically look to improve our proactive control capability, situational awareness and technology across our wastewater network to ensure that asset failures can be better predicted, reducing the impact of potential pollution incidents. We have more than 3,400 pumping stations across our network, many of them unmanned due to their size or remoteness of location, so making sure our alarms and control systems are working as they should is a priority.

Working together to co-create an industry-leading system

To prevent homes and businesses flooding, during very heavy rainfall we sometimes have to release screened stormwater – domestic wastewater heavily diluted by rainwater – into the environment. In May 2021 we launched an updated version of our Beachbuoy service; an online map that shows when and where this has happened so people can make an informed decision before entering the water.

Unlike anything in our industry, the map shows all 83 of our region's designated bathing waters and two non-designated recreation harbours, along with more detail about each release.

We originally piloted the service in 2018 for a handful of bathing waters; however, as part of our commitment to improve how we report on our environmental performance, we agreed to develop the system further. The trial received lots of interest from watersports enthusiasts and other local groups who shared ideas for improvements. We used this feedback to prioritise which features to develop and allocated people full-time to oversee this work.

The first change we made was to automate updates. Previously, data was input by hand and could cause delays. We have now linked Beachbuoy directly to our new spill reporting system, Aspire, so updates would show on the map in near real-time.

To ensure we were getting it right, we formed a Beachbuoy stakeholder group, which met for the first time in October 2020. The session was joined by around 20 people from groups such as Surfers Against Sewage, local authorities, public bodies and our regulators. The group has met every six to eight weeks since and has grown to include representatives from our entire region.

→ Read more at southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/our-bathing-waters/beachbuoy

Reducing pollution incidents

In September 2020 we published our Pollution Incident Reduction Plan (PIRP) which set an ambitious target to reduce pollution incidents to zero by 2040. To work towards this, we have developed a detailed programme of activities to deliver a step-change in how we work and prioritise and remedy issues on our sites.

The PIRP forms part of a wider initiative called Environment+, which is focused on harnessing our people, processes and systems to deliver a resilient water future for Southern Water's customers, by protecting our natural environment as well as our customers' properties.

The in-depth analysis, which we used to create the PIRP, is helping our dedicated Pollutions team to understand where and how our sites are most likely to impact the environment. The team has weekly internal conference calls and meets fortnightly to review progress and address issues. By understanding what can go wrong, and why, the team can focus investment on areas which will deliver the biggest reduction in pollution incidents. It is also learning from past pollution incidents and industry best practice to drive effective interventions to reduce pollution incidents in future.

So far, activities to resolve specific issues include:

- awareness and training available to all employees
- enhancing site resilience to power failure and electrical faults
- improving pump reliability
- customer behaviour programmes to reduce blockages caused by sewer misuse
- alarm transformation and enhanced rotas for our regional control centre.

➔ Read more at southernwater.co.uk/our-performance/reports/pollution-reduction-programme.

Taking steps to change our culture

To address the cultural issues experienced in our past, we know it is essential to do the right thing. We also know that to continue to improve our performance we must behave correctly and compliantly. In order to have a better view of these 'measures of culture' we created a dashboard of key metrics during the year, under four key themes: collaboration; driving results; customer focus; and ethical working.

These measures are collated and reported each quarter to give us, and our regulators a holistic view of the changes taking place across the organisation, at every level.

Collaboration measures include overall employee engagement, which we are thrilled to see has improved this year despite the impact of COVID-19 on colleagues, gender metrics, employee sickness levels and the number of internal STAR Award nominations made by colleagues, to colleagues.

Environmental and public health concerns drive those measures sitting under the driving results theme, and these include pollution incidents and self-reported pollutions, in addition to permit compliance at our water and wastewater treatment works. These are key areas for us where we know we need to show tangible improvements, both to our customers and our regulators.

We care about what our customers think about us, which is why we included a number of customer measures including complaints, guaranteed standards of service payments to customers we have let down, overall satisfaction with our services and net-promoter score (which captures how likely our customers are to recommend us as an organisation).

Of equal importance are our measures related to ethical working, which track a number of survey scores related to confidence in the company, integrity of colleagues, understanding of our values and Code of Ethics. This is also where the number and nature of the reports to our Speak Up service are captured – this is our anonymous reporting system, accessible by all employees.

➔ Read more about how we measure our culture on pages 168 to 175

Transparency and accountability

As a supplier of essential services, we have a duty of care to the communities we serve and, as such, our performance is independently scrutinised by a number of regulators including Ofwat, the Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

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