How we operate

Our vision is to create a resilient water future for our customers in the South East.

Water is collected

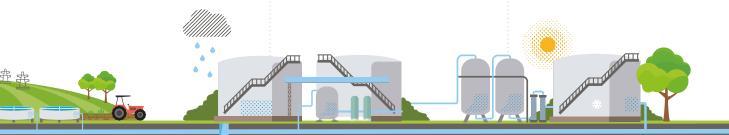
About 67.2% of the water we supply comes from groundwater (water stored underground in aquifers), 28.4% is taken from rivers and 4.4% comes from our reservoirs.

Water is cleaned

Our 75 water supply works treat raw water to the highest standards, making it safe to drink.

Clean water is put into supply

Our 13,919 kilometre network, 232 service reservoirs and 655 pumping stations deliver a continuous supply of clean water to our customers at a regulated pressure level.



Associated risk

In our densely populated and waterstressed region, we must balance the need to supply high-quality water to our customers with the need to preserve our natural resources, to help mitigate the risks posed by drought.

Associated risk

Failures at our treatment sites and across our network could result in a risk to public health due to reduced water quality and/or disruptions to supply. We use several chemicals in the treatment of water, which, if not handled correctly, could result in injuries to colleagues and/or customers. Area-specific risk assessments inform our monitoring programme, ensuring we are sampling for relevant substances to make sure we are treating water correctly.

Associated risk

We regularly test water that we pump into customers' homes and businesses to make sure it meets required standards. Our teams offer support on the installation of new pipework and notify customers when we find contaminants or lead pipes. We can experience increased leakage from our network and from customers' homes and businesses reducing available supplies.

Maintenance and development

We constantly monitor our sites and networks, carrying out maintenance and developing new assets and equipment to make sure they are meeting the standards set by our regulators. Failure to monitor, maintain and increase the capacity of our sites and networks could pose risks to public health, and result in disruptions to supply, injury to our employees or customers, and damage to property.

Our use of water and its return to the environment is a continuous cycle. Managing our impact at every stage is critical to protecting future resources. Our environment is constantly changing, and it is essential that we continue to adapt and prepare for the challenges of population growth and climate change.

Customers enjoy our water

Customers across the South East go about their daily lives enabled by a supply of safe, clean drinking water and the removal of wastewater from their homes and businesses. In 2022–23, we put 566 million litres per day into supply.

Wastewater is collected and treated

Our 39,973 kilometres of sewers and 3,499 pumping stations collect wastewater from our customers' homes and businesses, and from the drains outside. Each day, 1,248 million litres of wastewater is received and cleaned at our 363 treatment works, meeting strict environmental standards before being returned to the environment.

Customers are billed

Our customer teams calculate and distribute customers' bills, handle payments and manage any related account queries.





Associated risk

If we do not constantly look to improve and maintain high levels of service and quality, we run the risk of not fulfilling our obligations to customers, to provide high-quality drinking water.

Associated risk

If we do not remove wastewater effectively and manage our network, we may cause sewer flooding, environmental pollution and unnecessary distress to our customers. Varying rainfall patterns, extreme weather events and rising sea levels all contribute to an increased risk of flooding if our infrastructure is overwhelmed. This could also lead to contamination of water supplies and infiltration/inundation of our sewers and sites.

Associated risk

Errors in our billing calculations or customer information could lead to poor levels of customer satisfaction, and a rise in contact and complaints, which could damage the company's reputation and increase operating costs. Failure to properly protect customer data could also lead to significant fines under Data Protection (GDPR) and Networks and Information Systems (NIS) directives.

Ensuring future supply

Climate change and population growth in the South East present very real challenges that initiatives like our Water for Life – Hampshire programme are looking to address through bulk water transfers with neighbouring water companies, water recycling projects and a host of other initiatives, all of which will be needed to secure reliable water supplies for the future. We are also working to reduce the amount of water lost through leaks on our network, and we are working with our customers to help them use less water.

Associated risks

If we fail to plan properly and take account of factors such as the impact of climate change, we risk not being able to maintain supplies to our customers, which in turn can lead to financial penalties and reputational damage.

Living our purpose

Our purpose is why we exist. It drives our long and short-term decision making and is centred around the value we provide to our customers and stakeholders.

What we do and where

We provide essential water services to 2.7 million customers, and wastewater services to more than 4.7 million customers across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The external environment

The way we operate as a business is impacted by a number of external factors – social, political, environmental, economic, regulatory and technological – that we must consider and manage the impact of.

Environmental factors

Our natural environment is under pressure from population growth and climate change. We must continue to adapt and prepare to manage future impacts.

Economic environment

We are impacted by changes in financial markets, interest rates, inflation and other commodity prices, and we must manage these to reduce risk.

Regulatory environment

We must be responsive to regulatory requirements and prepare for future challenges.

Social environment

As a provider of essential services, we have a direct impact on our local communities. We must do all we can to support and understand our customers.

Innovation and technology

We are always improving our services, taking advantage of new technologies and innovations, wherever they come from.

Political environment

Decisions made by politicians and policymakers have the potential to impact our operations. We must follow any government directions, and adapt to policy developments.

Our key resources

For any business to be truly sustainable it needs to consider its impacts and dependencies, and this means going beyond tracking financial and operational measures to consider social and environmental resources and how they can affect our ability to create value over time.

Natural

Natural resources that we rely on, such as water.

People

Skills, capabilities and wellbeing of our employees and partners.

Financial

Financial health, including equity, debt and pensions.

Manufactured

Sites, equipment, networks and IT.

Social and relationship

Engagement, our reputation and the value we create for our communities.

Intellectual

Knowledge, systems, processes, procedures and the data we hold.

Underpinned by our risk and value process

Our risk and value (R&V) process improves our decision-making process, about how to invest, build and run our assets, and allows us to collaborate more effectively with our suppliers and partners. During the year, a number of environmental considerations were added to this process to make sure we are considering the natural capital (the wider value of services provided by nature) and carbon values in our decisions, so we can make them based on best value.

This approach triggers conversations and thinking about alternative sustainable solutions and drives innovation and partnership working. It is already showing us its value in supporting nature-based wetland solutions for wastewater treatment.

How we do it

Our Water for Life Business Plan 2020–25 takes us one step closer to achieving our vision of a resilient water future for customers in the South East.

Developed following extensive consultation with our customers and stakeholders, over the five-year period it will deliver significant performance improvements, including a 15% reduction in leakage, improvements to 182.3 kilometres of rivers and a further 155,000 customers supported through financial assistance schemes, with bills reducing by 18% in real terms.



Who we deliver value for

The water cycle touches and enables every part of life, so our stakeholder base is diverse.









Our people and partners



Our planning horizons and strategy

Our rigorous approach to planning across multiple horizons informs our strategy: Short-term priorities

Medium-term priorities

Read more about our planning horizons on page 32.



Our approach to sustainability

We operate in an environmentally and socially conscious manner and uphold the highest standards of corporate governance. Behaving in a responsible manner, 'Doing the Right Thing' and 'Working with Care' are core values that inform our decision making at every level of the organisation.

Read more about our corporate governance on pages 137 to 183.

Our external environment

We consider and manage the impact of a number of external drivers.

Environmental factors

We must plan for, and mitigate, the impacts of climate change by reducing our own emissions and minimising the environmental impact of our operations. The water cycle is continuous so we must ensure that we are removing water from, and returning it to, the environment safely and responsibly. We must also make sure that we are engaging with stakeholders and future customers to reduce our collective impact on the water environment.

Economic environment

We are impacted by changes in financial markets, interest rates, general inflation and other commodity prices, and we must manage these to reduce risks to our financial resilience and protect our investors' interests. We must also pay attention to the economic climate as it will have a direct impact on our customers and their ability to pay their bills.

Regulatory environment

We must operate as a sustainable business. This means being responsive to regulatory requirements and engaging constructively with market reforms as well as understanding and preparing for future challenges.

Our relationships with our regulators – economic, drinking water quality and environmental – are vital to ensure the resilience of our business and we work closely with them to share our progress and our plans, as well as influencing market reform.

Over the next 25 years, our regulators expect us to deliver important improvements in outcomes, significantly increasing drought resilience, reducing abstraction of water, reducing leakage, reducing per capita consumption, improving environmental water quality, and meeting net zero emissions.

Social environment

As a provider of essential services, we have a direct impact on our local communities. We must be mindful of this and do all we can to support and understand our customers. We know that there are areas across the South East experiencing high levels of deprivation, particularly because of rising inflation and recent increases in energy costs. We make it a priority to offer support and advice to our customers who might find themselves in a vulnerable situation due to circumstances.

Innovation and technology

We are always improving our services, taking advantage of new technologies and innovative ideas, wherever they may come from. 'Always Improving' is one of our core values and our bluewave innovation hub supports teams across the business, bringing design thinking to a range of projects. New technology, of course, can bring with it a number of risks, and so we constantly monitor our cyber security to meet the needs of the business.

Political environment

Decisions made by politicians have the potential to significantly impact the way we operate. As a result, we work closely with regional and national organisations to understand the development of any policies that will influence our business, while ensuring they understand the economic, environmental and social value we deliver for our communities in the South East. Future customers want many of the environmental targets achieved earlier and expect more radical systemic change by both the government and organisations to address the climate crisis.

The water sector

Water and wastewater services are provided by 11 licensed companies, and there are a number of smaller water-only companies, all serving more than 25 million households and commercial customers in England and Wales.

Since the industry was privatised in 1989, a regulatory framework has been in place to ensure that customers receive a good standard of service at a fair price, managed by the industry economic regulator Ofwat. This framework has seen these water and wastewater companies invest billions of pounds maintaining and improving sites, technology and services, and, in turn, improving drinking water quality and enhancing the environment.

The challenges of population growth and climate change mean that the water industry must significantly change the way it operates over the coming years. As a result, the policy landscape is continually evolving. The 25-Year Environment Plan, Environment Act, review of the Water Industry National Environment Programme and preparation for the next business plan period 2025–30, are just some of the key drivers for change in the water sector and beyond.

By 2050, within Southern Water's region, we are anticipating losing a third of our water sources as a result of climate change. To protect our sensitive environment, we will also see a reduction in the amount of water we are allowed to take from rivers and underground sources, and our population will have grown by 19-25%. Without action, we predict a supply deficit by 2030, equivalent to around 50% of our current supply.

We are working proactively with the rest of the sector, regulators, stakeholders and others on workable solutions to these challenges, which we simply cannot solve alone. Concerns around storm overflows and chalk streams are examples where a multi-sector approach is essential, and we fully support the government's efforts to facilitate a collective response. We are actively exploring new ways of working using natural capital approaches to deliver more nature-based solutions, such as constructed wetlands creation, sustainable urban drainage and river restoration projects.

We also support the government commitment to deliver net zero carbon water and waste services, and we are aiming to bring our services in line with these targets by 2050.

Working with our regulators

We are subject to regulation of our price and performance by economic, quality and environmental regulators, as outlined below.



The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) determines the overall water and sewerage policy framework in England, setting standards, drafting legislation and creating special permits, such as drought orders. defra.gov.uk



Ofwat is the economic regulator of the water and sewerage sectors. It protects the interests of consumers by promoting appropriate competition, making sure water companies properly carry out their functions and ensuring they have the adequate finance in place. ofwat.gov.uk



The Environment Agency is the environmental regulator of the water and wastewater sector in England. It is the principal adviser to the government on the environment, and the leading public body improving and protecting the environment of England. It works with a range of organisations to reduce flood risk, promote sustainable development, and secure environmental and social benefits. gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency



The Drinking Water Inspectorate is the drinking water quality regulator and enforces the Water Quality Regulations set by the government. To do this, it checks the tests carried out on drinking water by water companies, along with carrying out company inspections. dwi.gov.uk



CCW represents water and wastewater consumers. It also investigates consumer complaints that have not been satisfactorily resolved by water companies. ccwater.org.uk



Natural England advises the government by providing practical guidance, grounded in science, on how to best safeguard England's natural wealth. Its purpose is to protect and improve England's natural environment and encourage people to enjoy and get involved with their surroundings. naturalengland.gov.uk

Read more about how we engage with our regulators on pages 33 and 35.

Our external environment continued

We have identified the main factors that affect our business.

A growing population

Population growth will place more pressure on limited resources.

- The UK's population has grown by 8.7 million people in 20 years.
- By 2050, the population in the South East is predicted to grow by another 19-25%.
- Increased housing development and reduced open spaces will require new water solutions.
- · Greater demand for agricultural production.

Material issues: Climate change; public health; natural capital; responsible supply chain; water use; political and regulatory environment; local economies; energy use; stakeholder engagement; and networks.

Affected capitals:









How we are responding:

Through Water Resources South East, we are collaborating with our neighbouring water companies to manage the development of the region's water resources, ensuring an affordable, resilient and sustainable water supply to meet growing demand. Read more: wrse.org.uk.

We are already making connections to neighbouring water company networks in water-stressed areas to enable the sharing of water to increase supply and meet demand. Our Water for Life Hampshire programme is developing a new network of water mains across the region. Read more: southernwater.co.uk/our-story/our-plans/water-for-life-hampshire.

We have developed our water and wastewater plans to meet future demand. Read more: southernwater. co.uk/dwmp and southernwater.co.uk/our-story/waterresources-management-plan.

Changing communities

Communities are adapting due to demographics and societal changes.

- People are increasingly focused on health and wellbeing.
- · More people are living alone.
- The average age of the population is predicted to be over 65 by 2050.
- Increasing mobility means that nearly three million households move each year.
- · Hybrid working increases demand for local services.

Material issues: Health, safety, security and wellbeing; public health; affordability and vulnerability; trust, transparency and legitimacy; and water use.

Affected capitals:









How we are responding:

Every community is unique. During our ongoing engagement with customers and stakeholders, we make sure we recruit a representative range of customers from across our region – including demographics such as income, household size, customer segment and location.

This year, we have run research programmes across our main population areas such as Southampton, Isle of Wight, Brighton, Hastings, Chatham, Thanet and so on. This insight allows us to adapt to the changing shape of our communities, understanding their priorities and how best to engage with them.

From this work we create summaries, infographics, posters and a booklet for teams across the business so the insight we have gathered can be applied to projects and delivery plans.

Key to our capitals

In order to create an integrated view of the value we create, we are starting to use the following stocks of value or 'capitals' that can be affected or transformed by our activities and outputs.



Matural



People 1



Financial



Manufactured



Social and relationship



Intellectual

Evolving customer expectations

Customer expectations are evolving with technology and greater access to information.

- Increasing expectations on speed of service from other sectors.
- Increasing demand for real-time data that improves their lifestyle and finances.
- An expectation of 100% availability from their utility providers with lower tolerance of failure.
- · A desire for personalised services tailored to customers' needs.

Material issues: Customer service; affordability and vulnerability; data protection; energy; and water use.

Affected capitals:













How we are responding:

During the year we have increased the number of customer newsletters circulated so we are keeping local communities updated about key construction schemes and upgrades to our services.

We have increased the quantity of information available via our signage for capital works. We recognise that this is particularly important in areas where we have ongoing or repeat issues, for example in Lancing, West Sussex.

We have updated our systems to allow us to send out more text message updates during an incident. Most of our customers told us this was how they wanted to hear from us.

We have continued to focus on improving our customers' ability to self-serve, as many of them have told us that they do not want to have to call or email us. This includes updates to our web chat service and increasing the number of people responding to queries on social media.

We are also starting to explore a video triage service for operational customer call outs across our water and wastewater teams. Allowing us to direct our resources to those that need them most.

Read more about our operational performance on pages 42 to 95.

Increasing use of technology

Big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are all becoming increasingly common.

- · Growing ability to unlock valuable insights from data.
- Data becoming increasingly open to all customers, stakeholders and government.
- Increasing automation to simplify and speed up processes.
- Using AI to learn and adapt to changing environments.

Material issues: Water use; compliance; customer service; community engagement; trust; transparency; and legitimacy.

Affected capitals:







How we are responding:

Unlocking insights from data We have been building digital analytics to more accurately track website journeys, contact forms and call centre contact so we can identify improvements and customers in need of help.

Open data This year we participated in a range of open data initiatives, both independently and across the industry as part of the Ofwat Innovation Fund's Stream programme. We also delivered a series of open data projects independently including regional investment maps, and the Beachbuoy application, leading the industry in transparent publishing of spills data.

Process automation We have automated several processes to support our customers during water supply incidents. For example, we are now able to quickly compile lists of affected customers on our Priority Services Register, enabling us to offer support more quickly. We have also automated processes for customer contact, Guaranteed Standards of Service and compensation payments making claims quicker and easier.

Platforms We are in the process of implementing new data and analytics platforms to further enable machine learning and AI on a large scale. We have existing applications of advanced analytics in use at the moment. For example, we use machine learning to identify the most appropriate pathway for customers in our debt collection process enabling a more personalised approach and support.

Our external environment continued

Rising concerns about the environment

Demand to protect the environment is driving change in government priorities.

- Social media rapidly exposing environmental harm.
- · Any pollutions seen as unacceptable.
- Rare and fragile chalk streams under threat.
- · Storm overflows not seen as acceptable.
- · Open-water swimming increasing in popularity.

Material issues: Compliance; health, safety, security and wellbeing; public health; trust, transparency and legitimacy; political and regulatory environment; stakeholder engagement; and networks.

Affected capitals:











How we are responding:

Responding to this demand and future proofing our systems could require significant investment, however this needs to be balanced with the ability to provide our services to customers at a fair and affordable price.

People expect to be able to access clean beaches and healthy rivers throughout the year and are increasingly intolerant of organisations they perceive as preventing this. We have Event Duration Monitors (EDMs) on 98.6% of our storm overflows giving us visibility and, more importantly, the ability to report pollutions accurately. Further improvements have also been made to our Beachbuoy release monitoring service, which uses data from EDMs.

Our Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force has launched six projects across our region from Kent to the Isle of Wight, aimed at reducing excess water entering our sewers, limiting the use of storm overflows. Read more on pages 64 and 68.

Our latest Pollution Incident Reduction Plan details our investment and year-on-year improvements. Read more: southernwater.co.uk/our-story/our-plans/pollution-reduction-programme.

We are investing to develop new water sources and transfers in the Hampshire region to reduce pressure on the chalk streams of the Rivers Test and Itchen. Read more: southernwater.co.uk/our-story/our-plans/water-for-life-hampshire.

We have set up our Independent Climate and Environment Group that is scrutinising and informing our plans to 2050. Read more on page 38.

Climate change

Climate change is impacting our environment and the way we operate our water and wastewater services.

- · Need to reduce carbon emissions.
- Forecasts of more extreme weather, warmer land, air and sea, polar ice melting, changes in ocean currents.
- Seasonal storms increasing in intensity and hyperlocality.
- · Biodiversity reducing.

Material issues: Compliance; climate change; public health; energy use; natural capital; responsible supply chain; water use; materials; and solid waste.

Affected capitals:











How we are responding:

Our third Climate Change Adaptation Report (2021) highlighted the impacts that we would need to adapt to and mitigate for across our region. Read more about our approach to climate change on pages 75 to 95.

We have created a set of natural capital accounts that we are now using to assess the value of natural assets across our region and inform our decision making. Read our natural capital case study on page 31.

Our Water Resources Management Plan and Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan have been created in consultation with regional stakeholders and neighbouring water companies to address the impacts of climate change on our infrastructure. Read more: southernwater.co.uk/dwmp or southernwater.co.uk/our-story/water-resources-management-plan.

Key resources

In order to create an integrated view of the value we create, we are starting to use the following capitals that can be affected or transformed by our activities and outputs.

CASE STUDY

Natural capital

"To deliver reliable, high-quality water and wastewater services to our customers now and in the future, we must protect and improve the natural environment, which underpins these services. We call these natural assets our natural capital and are considering them alongside our built asset base.

"Natural capital refers to the elements of nature (rivers, lakes, woodlands, wetlands) that deliver benefits to people by providing ecosystem services, such as providing fresh water, reducing flooding and providing health and wellbeing benefits. In the South East, this includes our rivers – such as the unique chalk streams of the Rivers Test and Itchen – and the coast.

"To help us understand the extent and condition of our natural capital and the ecosystem services supplied we have developed baseline natural capital accounts for three river catchments – the Arun and Western Streams, the Medway and the Test and Itchen. This information will be used to inform our planning and investment decisions, strengthening our resilience, reducing costs and building trust with our stakeholders. Read the full report: southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/protecting-the-environment/measuring-our-natural-capital.

"The accounts will help us track changes in natural capital value over time, as we work in partnership with stakeholders to build, restore or improve the natural environment.

"Our next step is to extend the baseline accounts to all of our 11 river catchments. This will provide a full picture of natural capital across our operating area."

Sean Ashworth, Environment Strategy Manager

Stakeholders impacted:

(ii) Customers and communities

The environment

Our people and partners

Regulators

nvestors !

CASE STUDY

Social and relationship capital

"To make sure that the environment, customers and our communities are at the heart of our decision making, we have been working more closely with our delivery partners to explore projects with social value reporting benchmarks as part of our reporting.

"The £28 million upgrade of our Horsham Wastewater Treatment Works started during 2022, and was identified as a project where we could work with our delivery partners CMDP-JV to explore the impact on the local community.

"An assessment of the key criteria to be measured has been carried out, such as localised procurement and employment, apprenticeships, volunteer hours and carbon reduction.

"The project has also launched a schools programme, in primary schools and after-school groups.

"It also co-funded a community centre energy grant to award 20 community centres with £1,000. The money was used to support their utility bills over the winter months to make sure they could stay open.

"The teams at Horsham have also been taking part in local volunteering projects. Providing 1,000 hours of their time and loaning of specialist equipment and skills to help local homeless charity Turning Tides to renovate a new building. The space has been turned into accommodation for 50 homeless people.

"The pilot aims to capture quarterly measurements using the national TOMS methodology and framework. We'll then use the findings to inform similar projects in our next investment period from 2025–30."

Alex Willumsen, Community Partnerships and Programme Manager

Stakeholders impacted:

(ii) Customers and communities

The environment

Our people and partners

Regulators

nvestors !

Our planning horizons and strategy

Vision

To create a resilient water future for our customers in the South East.

Long 25 years+

The nature of our business means we must think in long-term planning and investment cycles to make sure we can deliver on our ambitious vision:

Long-term priorities

- Understanding and supporting our customers
- Protecting and improving the environment
- Enabling and empowering our people
- Ensuring a supply of high quality water for the future

Medium five years+

Our medium-term planning reflects our five-year cycle of asset management planning (AMP) periods and supports our long-term priorities:

Current delivery strategy 2020-25

- Deliver great service
- Use water wisely
- Protect and improve the environment
- Fit for the future

Read more about our current performance on pages 42 to 95.

Short one to two years

We have created four workstreams as part of our Turnaround Plan to make sure we are in the best possible position to deliver our ambitious plans for 2025–30.

Turnaround Plan

- Empowered and supported colleagues Enabling our people to work in a safe, collaborative and inclusive workplace that offers rewarding careers at the heart of our communities.
- A reliable supply of water for our customers Safeguarding resources and making sure our customers have access to a supply of high-quality water now and into the future.
- Healthy seas and rivers Protecting and improving the environment, working transparently to enhance inland and coastal habitats.
- Trusted and easy customer service Supporting our customers with easy service and transparent communications that show we care for our communities.

These are underpinned by a focus on our people, IT and digitalisation and finance and efficiency.