

Business performance



2023/24 was the third year of our six-year PC21 Business Plan (2021-27). Our PC21 plan, endorsed by the Utility Regulator, was ambitious and set out the step change in investment required to improve water and sewerage infrastructure, facilitate economic growth and protect the environment. The plan also challenged NI Water to deliver further performance improvements for our customers while continuing to drive down costs and embrace innovation.

Our performance is summarised below. In the first half of PC21 when we were fully funded we made good progress. However, the outlook for the remainder of PC21 is much less positive as we face the potential of a significant cut to funding. We are about to approach the point at which we are unable to recover delivery of PC21. This exposes the company to enforcement proceedings from the Utility Regulator and the possibility of legal action by other stakeholders for failure to meet its statutory obligations. In such circumstances, the Board of Directors has concluded that material uncertainties exist, which cast doubt on the ability of the company to continue as a going concern.

It is increasingly evident that our current funding model is not working. The long-term success of NI Water can only be realised if we can secure sustainable funding, which matches the Regulatory determination, to enable us to be resilient and give us the flexibility needed to properly plan, manage and deliver large multi-year projects. We continue to engage with our Government Shareholder, and other stakeholders to make the case for this commitment.


Delighting our customers

We are embracing new ways to meet rising customer expectations. Since increasing the operational hours of our social media platforms and introducing web chat, our social media base has continued to grow. Monthly web chat usage increased during 2023/24, and feedback from customers has been very positive. Our customer base for web self-serve also continues to expand, with a refresh of the web self-serve for developers in 2023/24.

Our focus is on minimising the need for customers to contact us and for those customers that do make contact, to ensure we resolve their issue first time.

We introduced early warning text notifications for metered non-domestic customers experiencing high water consumption. Over 2023/24 we delivered against our targets for unwanted customer contacts, first point of contact resolution and Net Promoter Score. Our focus on customers was recognised in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index Results for the first six months of 2023. NI Water was listed as the second highest performing water company for overall customer satisfaction and the third highest performer in the Utilities Sector Report.

Caring for vulnerable customers and maintaining our cyber security are vital elements to our customer service. During 2023/24 we introduced the JAM (Just a Minute) card across the entire organisation. The JAM card allows anyone with a hidden disability or communication barriers to discreetly ask for 'Just A Minute' of patience when they need it. Our Cyber Resilience Programme is helping us keep at the forefront of an ever-changing threat landscape and be aware of new methods of attack as they develop.

 Read more about delivering an exceptional customer experience on page 30.

Clean and safe water when you need it

We are committed to providing great tasting, clean and safe drinking water which complies with statutory standards and meets the expectations of our customers. Overall drinking water quality compliance in the 2023 calendar year is above the PC21 target of 99.83%.

NI Water is one of the largest landowners in Northern Ireland. Our catchments are often upland and dominated by peat and

heathland. When functioning correctly, peat bogs provide multiple ecosystem services, including water quality improvement, flood mitigation, habitat, societal benefit, and carbon storage. In 2023/24, we completed a management plan for a further phase of peatland restoration work at Garron Plateau, which we aim to complete via an externally funded project in partnership with RSPB NI over the next five years. We are also pursuing funding under the Peace Plus Programme for both biodiversity and water catchment projects.

The majority of our raw water is currently sourced from lakes and reservoirs that are above ground and then treated to provide drinking water. Several new projects and operational interventions were completed in 2023/24, which have improved current supply/demand and resilience issues, includes among other activities, new clear water basins at Seagahan and Fofanny water treatment works and the upgrade of Derg water treatment works.


Our 'every minute counts' ethos underpins the best performance in relation to minimising water supply interruptions for customers, even during periods of increased demand. High temperatures in June 2023 saw demand for water rise by around 15% to 700 million litres per day, requiring an extensive tankering operation to ensure we kept customers in supply, especially in the west and south.

The water we supply for domestic use or food production must comply with UK national standards. We continue to engage with the Drinking Water Inspectorate, for Northern Ireland on potential changes to the Drinking Water Regulations, in line with European standards, and have put in place a monitoring programme for potential new parameters.

Sunlight combined with the presence of nutrients plus high temperatures resulted in unprecedented levels of algae growth in Lough Neagh over 2023/24. There is a complex range of pressures across multiple sectors impacting on the Lough's water quality. Our water treatment works which rely on Lough Neagh are designed with the potential for algae to be present and robust treatment and sampling processes are in place.

We are committed to driving down levels of leakage in our drinking water network. In 2023/24, NI Water reported its lowest ever level of leakage at 155 million litres per day

against a target of 154 million litres per day. This reduction has been achieved despite Northern Ireland experiencing the highest recorded levels of rainfall and the highest average annual temperature.

 Read more about supporting a healthy and thriving population on page 36.

Sustainable economic growth

Many of our sewerage networks and wastewater treatment plants are having to operate at or beyond their design capacity, limiting opportunities for new connections and constraining economic development in over 100 towns and cities across Northern Ireland, including Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Our PC21 Business Plan sets out the investment required to start to address the wastewater capacity constraints. We anticipate that it will take a sustained increase in investment over the next 18 years plus to solve the problem of development constraints. Investments completed over 2023/24 such as the £18m Ards North Wastewater Improvement Project demonstrate what can be delivered. This project will improve the quality of bathing waters along part of the Ards Peninsula to support long-term economic growth in local development and tourism.


We are aware this is a challenging time for businesses and the local economy. Like many of our business customers, we continue to face significant financial pressures from continued high energy prices, high inflationary conditions, and other cost increases. Whilst any increase is of course unwelcome, we have worked hard to ensure most of our customers will continue to see their bills rise by less than inflation.

Over 2023/24, the NI Audit Office concluded their review on the funding of NI Water's infrastructure. The findings included the need for multi-year funding to deliver PC21 and a comprehensive review of the alternative funding and governance arrangements led by suitably qualified experts.

Advances in our investment management processes are helping us ensure we deliver our services for the lowest possible cost. We are expanding our carbon accounting to capture whole life carbon and land carbon. Pilot projects are being undertaken over the remainder of PC21 to examine the use

Business performance

of a multi-capitals approach to support our decision making. We are working closely with NIEA on the review of consenting method and source apportionment techniques, which will contribute towards ensuring discharge standards at our wastewater treatment works are proportionate, whilst delivering the best environmental outcome.

 Read more about supporting a growing economy on page 46.

Flourishing natural environment

Every day we recycle wastewater from Northern Ireland's homes and businesses before safely returning it to the rivers and sea. Traditional treatment works are carbon intensive, requiring a lot of energy, concrete and chemicals to ensure treated wastewater can be safely released back to the environment. We are committed to a more sustainable approach to wastewater treatment.


Our PC21 Business Plan includes ambitious storm water removal targets aimed at reducing risk of property flooding, enhancing our natural environment, and facilitating economic growth. During 2023/24 we completed the £7m Ravenhill Avenue Flood Alleviation Project removing around nine hectares, equivalent to 12 football pitches, of stormwater from the combined sewerage network.

We recognise the need to improve how we measure wastewater compliance. The current regulatory monitoring programme is based on pre-announced rather than unannounced regulatory sampling at the treatment works and the reported wastewater compliance doesn't incorporate flow compliance for the wastewater treatment works or the sewer network. This provides an incomplete picture of environmental compliance and protection. A Wastewater Regulation Compliance Reform Group has been established with senior management representation from NI Water and NIEA. It is recognised that the outcome of the proposed regulation change will result in new evidence, which will highlight non-compliance across our wastewater infrastructure.

During periods of heavy rainfall highly diluted wastewater may also be discharged from storm overflows, which are design features on a wastewater system, acting as

emergency relief points. This prevents the flooding of homes, businesses, and schools, which would present public health hazards. NI Water has around 2,500 storm overflows. The roll out of event duration monitors over PC21 is helping to quantify the frequency and duration of discharges. We plan to have over 700 monitors installed by 2027, representing around 30% coverage of all storm overflows. Assessment is ongoing and of those evaluated to date around three quarters are unable to meet the standard set by NIEA.

Large sections of the UK economy have moved to mandatory climate change reporting against the Taskforce on Climate related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). NI Water transitioned towards TCFD compliance in 2023/24 and we will continue to develop our disclosures across climate governance, strategy, risk assessment and metrics/targets. A key area of focus over 2024/25 is the development of a transition plan including annual net zero targets to achieve our 2030 net zero energy and 2040 net zero ambition.

 Read more about protecting and enhancing the natural environment on page 54.

Happy, safe and healthy people

Whilst many organisations are experiencing the 'great resignation,' our staff turnover remained consistently low at around 5%, while average tenure has remained high at over 16 years. Over 2023/24, we commenced a multi-year management development programme that will develop world class management capabilities at all levels. We continue to grow and diversify our entry level academy to seed our organisation with top talent to support succession planning. The academy has grown to more than 100 students over the last three years, offering apprenticeship, higher level apprenticeship and graduate programmes in a range of disciplines. Our progress was recognised by NI Water being named 'Employer of the Year' at the Belfast Telegraph Business Awards.


Health and safety is an integral part of our day-to-day business. Our Health, Safety and Facilities Transformation Programme (2021-2025) sets out several priorities for health and safety. Significant investment continues to be made in our facilities and above ground buildings and related assets. Driver awareness was one of the areas of focus for 2023/24, with mandatory health and safety

training being integrated into employee learning paths over 2024/25.

We use a range of listening strategies to gather the voice of the employee and ensure that action is targeted in the right place. Our employee survey in 2023/24 reported higher than average engagement levels across all functions, a supportive and inclusive culture, a strong emphasis on safety and an agile and empowered organisation.

We are creating an environment where everyone feels valued and able to contribute fully to their full potential. Over 2023/24, we continued our involvement in the UK Government's 'Levelling Up' goals and our Sisters IN female mentoring programme. Inclusive Leadership training was delivered to around 200 middle managers, HR, the senior leadership team, the Executive Committee, and the Board. Corporate values workshops were delivered to over 400 employees, aiming to reach most of our workforce over 2024/25.

NI Water is building a legacy for communities. Our Cares Challenge volunteering scheme is one of the largest in Northern Ireland and has delivered over 12,000 employee hours since inception to help good causes. Employees have volunteered across a wide range of areas, including painting residential care homes, tree planting and conservation work. We continue to spread the message on the value of water for health, the economy and nature through our unique education programme, which included over 200 school visits and nearly 80 community visits during the year. Through our lead role in the local Water-Aid Committee, our support extends to communities in other countries such as Malawi.

 Read more about helping our people and communities to thrive on page 76.

In summary, I am very proud of our people and their achievements during 2023/24. The enabling nature of water and wastewater infrastructure is clear, and I look forward to continued engagement with our Shareholder and stakeholders to maximise our ability to support the Programme for Government and the ambitions of the NI Executive.



Dr Sara Venning
Chief Executive
8 July 2024