



Looking to the future



**Company strategy
Essex & Suffolk version**

Northumbrian Water Limited: Essex & Suffolk operating area



Essex & Suffolk operating areas

Essex & Suffolk Water provides water services to two separate supply areas.

We serve a population of 0.3 million in our Suffolk area. This area is mainly rural with the biggest towns being Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

Our Essex area, which currently has a population of 1.5 million, is part rural and part urban with the main areas of population being in Chelmsford, Southend and the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Northumbrian Water also provides water and sewerage services to 2.6 million people in its North Eastern operating area.

Foreword



We are proud of the service we provide in Essex & Suffolk.

The quality of our drinking water is the best it has ever been and, for the third year running, we scored highest of all water and sewerage companies for customer satisfaction in research undertaken by the Consumer Council for Water.

We are now planning the services we will deliver in 2010-15 and have used extensive customer research to find out what customers think about our current services and their priorities for improvements. In these times of economic difficulty it is especially important to ensure customers are willing to pay for improvements and we have, therefore, taken care to understand their views in this respect.

This document describes the services we plan to provide, taking on board the results of the customer research and the views of regulators and other stakeholders. Our plan, which includes an important

programme to ensure water supplies are maintained in Essex, received high levels of customer support in the research undertaken after our draft plan was published.

There have been a number of significant and unavoidable changes since we published our draft plan, including increased tax liability and business rates. The economic recession is also having an impact, with reduced water use resulting in the requirement for higher charges to recover our costs.

Given these changes, it is inevitable that water bills will be higher than we proposed in our draft plan. Whilst this will be unwelcome news for customers, we have done all we can to manage the impact of increased costs. We have used central estimates to ensure risk is shared fairly. We have also phased prices to avoid a large increase in 2010-11, which we believe would have been unacceptable.

Our bills in Essex & Suffolk will continue to be relatively low considering the investment required to maintain water supplies in this dry part of the country.

We believe our plan represents excellent value for money and will allow the company to continue to deliver top class services in Essex & Suffolk.

John Cuthbert

Managing Director

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J Cuthbert', written over a horizontal line.

7th April 2009

Company strategy Summary



INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of Part A of our Final Business Plan, which sets out our plans for water services in our Essex & Suffolk operating areas for the period 2010-15. A separate document describes plans for water and sewerage services in our North Eastern operating area.

The Final Business Plan is an important document in the water industry price review 2009 (PR09). PR09 is the process by which Ofwat will set limits on the prices companies can charge their customers for the five years from 1 April 2010.

The final business plan will be used by Ofwat as the basis for setting draft price limits in July 2009. Customers and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to comment on draft price limits before they are finalised in November 2009.

DEVELOPING OUR PLANS

Our aim is to provide the services our customers want at a price they find acceptable. To understand our customers' needs, we carried out extensive customer research which established priorities for service improvement and willingness to pay for them.

As well as meeting the needs expressed by customers, our plan addresses a number of specific challenges:

- investing in services whilst also keeping bills at affordable levels
- responding to the impacts of the economic recession
- maintaining water supplies in Essex as the population grows
- reducing carbon emissions to help prevent the damaging effects of climate change
- ensuring our assets are protected from sea and river flooding
- maintaining a stable financial position

We have also liaised closely and effectively with the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater), the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Environment Agency, Natural England and other stakeholders in producing our plans.

Our plans take us a significant step towards the goals and aspirations for the longer term set out in our Strategic Direction Statement published in November 2007, which can be found on our website www.eswater.co.uk.

RESPONDING TO CUSTOMERS' VIEWS

There are few areas where customers have indicated they want improvements to service. We believe this is because satisfaction with service is already very high. This was confirmed by the results of research by CCWater (the water industry watchdog) where, for the third year running, we scored the highest of all water and sewerage companies for customer satisfaction.

After publication of our draft plan, customer research was undertaken to establish the degree of support for our proposals. We found there was a high level of support for all aspects of our service offering, confirming that we had interpreted our customers' views appropriately. Our proposals for future services, therefore, remain substantially unchanged in the Final Business Plan.

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SUMMARY OF WHAT WE WILL DELIVER IN ESSEX & SUFFOLK 2010-15

Customer satisfaction

- Further improvements to satisfaction with service and value for money
- A significant reduction in billing and operational complaints
- Further development of payment methods including online payment facilities



Water Quality

- Reliable, safe water supplies, addressing risks through the 'Water Safety Plan' approach
- The new standard for lead in drinking water achieved
- Small schemes to address deteriorating raw water quality
- Improvements in the taste and odour of drinking water
- Improved liaison with farmers and land managers to protect sources used to supply drinking water

Meeting future water needs

- Near to universal metering in Essex by 2020 (60% by 2015) and Suffolk by 2030 (64% by 2015)
- Encouragement to customers to save water, prioritised according to water resource position
- Low leakage levels maintained, requiring significant mains renewal in Essex
- Major resource development for Essex (the Abberton scheme)
- Increases in water system capacity required to meet population growth and relocation

Keeping the water flowing

- Reductions to planned interruptions
- Maintain current level of unplanned interruptions of over six hours duration
- Maintain current low levels of properties at risk of low water pressure

Improving the water environment

- Undertake investigations into the impact of certain water abstractions on the environment

Encouraging biodiversity and catchment management

- Continue to encourage biodiversity on all our sites
- Development of our partnership initiative 'Branch Out' to help build habitat resilience

Sustainable operation and resilience

- Development and implementation of a carbon reduction plan covering all our operations
- Production of 20% of our energy from self-generated renewable resources by 2015
- Aspiration to achieve a 50% reduction in operational carbon from 2007-08 levels by 2020
- Investment to protect our assets from flooding risk
- Update our assessment of operational resilience in the light of changing circumstances

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COSTS OF DELIVERY

Note: Operating costs and capital expenditure in this section reflect company-wide requirements (Essex & Suffolk plus the North East).

Efficiency proposals

We aim to deliver the objectives in our plan efficiently and effectively, to ensure customers' bills are no higher than they need to be.

We intend to reduce base operating costs over the 2010 to 2015 period by 1% per annum for the water service and 2% per annum for the sewerage service. These challenging efficiency savings are in addition to major reductions made over the last 20 years and will help offset above inflation increases in some of our costs.

Changes since our draft plan

Since we submitted our draft plan, there have been a number of changes to forecast expenditure from factors mainly outside our control. Whilst there are movements in both directions, the net impact is a large increase in expenditure pushing bills upwards. The main changes are shown below.

Changes since our draft plan

Government driven changes

- Tax increases (removal of Industrial Building Allowances)
- Increased business rates
- Increasing customer debt as a result of the new Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act
- Cost of permits to work in highways from the new Traffic Management Act

Changes as a result of the Economic recession

- Reduced demand for services (our fixed costs have to be recovered from lower sales)
- Pensions deficit resulting from falling stock market prices

Other changes

- Energy price reductions (but still an increase on assumptions made at the last review)
- Revaluation of assets completed – higher Current Cost Depreciation
- Reduction in capital investment (some as a result of the recession)
- Reduced volume related costs due to lower demand
- Lower capital cost inflation (COPI)

Overall, the net effect of cost increases and efficiency savings result in a 9% increase in total operating costs from 2007-08 to 2014-15, excluding inflation.

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Capital investment

To meet our objectives we will need to invest a total of £1.27 billion (net of contributions) over the next five years, nearly 20% more than allowed at the last review but slightly less than our draft programme. Whilst investment in mandatory improvements to drinking water quality have continued to reduce, increases are required to deliver appropriate levels of asset maintenance and manage the security of water supplies in Essex.

Our proposed asset maintenance programme has been subject to rigorous internal challenge and reflects the minimum sustainable level required to maintain services. It is well founded on robust asset planning processes in line with the framework agreed with regulators. The company's proposals for future levels of capital maintenance investment at previous periodic reviews have been found to be appropriate and, as a result, we have considerable confidence in our planning capability.

We were concerned, therefore, to find that Ofwat had adjusted the scope of our capital maintenance proposals significantly downwards in its draft baseline document. We have carefully reviewed and refined our proposals since we submitted our draft plan and remain convinced that we have identified the right level of capital maintenance investment.

Financing the capital programme

It is essential that the company is able to raise the funds it requires to finance the future investment. A key financial assumption in this respect is the cost of capital and the current volatile financial climate makes it more problematic than usual to assess what this should be.

In our Draft Business Plan, we assumed a cost of capital of 4.7% real, post tax, significantly lower than at the last price review (5.1% real, post tax), partially offsetting the impact on bills of increased investment and higher operating costs. We have reviewed this assumption and have decided to retain 4.7% for our final plan. This is at the lower end of the possible range identified by NERA in a recent report on the cost of capital. Our approach will help keep bills down.

IMPACT ON PRICES AND CUSTOMERS' BILLS

Overall prices

We have modelled the impact of our proposals for 2010-15 on prices and customers' bills. Price limits are expressed as a percentage above or below inflation. This is called the 'K' factor. Ofwat sets separate indicative price limits for the water and sewerage services. The water price limit applies to both the North East and Essex & Suffolk.

The overall average annual price limit required by our plan is +3.4% comprising +4.3% for the water service and +2.1% for the sewerage service. This is higher than proposed in our draft plan because of the changes described above. We have phased price limits in AMP5 to avoid an overall K of +11% in 2010-11, which we believe customers would have found unacceptable.

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We considered spreading the price increases equally across the five years. However, we were unable to reduce the price increase in the early years whilst maintaining a satisfactory financial position. In any case, to maintain the same overall cashflow on this basis would have resulted in bills rising by over 4% more than with our proposed phasing by 2014-15. This would have meant bills in Essex & Suffolk rising by a further £8.60.

Our policy of charging customers no more than is necessary was demonstrated by our decision not to use the full price limit allowed by Ofwat for 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10. This has resulted in bills overall being around 2% lower than they otherwise would have been in 2009-10 but has the effect of making the price increases in AMP5 appear larger.

Application of price limits

The overall price limit for the water service denotes the average increase to prices in the North East and Essex & Suffolk. When setting tariffs, it is necessary to consider whether there are reasons why the price limit should be applied differentially to reflect any significant variations in costs in each charging area. This is to ensure customers' bills continue to reflect broadly the cost of providing the services they receive. For example, it would not be fair to expect customers in the North East to pay for improvements to service benefiting customers in Essex & Suffolk only.

Our plans include significantly more investment and other costs (per property) in Essex & Suffolk than in the North East. This includes investment in mains renewal to manage leakage and the Abberton water resource scheme. Other cost drivers, particularly EA abstraction charges, are also greater in Essex & Suffolk. We are, therefore, proposing to apply the water K factors to reflect differences in investment and costs between the two areas. This results in the following average annual increases in prices (not including inflation), phased to avoid a large first year increase.

Average price increases, not including inflation (%)

Essex & Suffolk	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Average
Water	8.2	8.2	8.2	0	0	4.9
North East						
Water	6.2	6.2	6.2	0	0	3.7

Water bills for our customers in Suffolk are currently higher than those in Essex. This position is broadly reflective of the costs of supplying the two areas in the past. However, in the future there will be a rebalancing of costs between Essex and Suffolk primarily due to investment to secure water supplies to Essex. In this circumstance we no longer consider it appropriate to maintain higher charges in Suffolk. Our proposal is to harmonise charges in Essex and Suffolk in the 2010-15 period which CCWater supports in principle.

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Customers' bills

Our proposals result in average household bills as shown in the table below.

Average household bills (2007-08 prices)

	Actual 1999-00	Actual 2009-10	Forecast 2014-15
Essex & Suffolk (water)	£162	£166	£195

Despite investing £1.2 million in improving our assets, water bills remained broadly stable between 1999-00 and 2009-10. Proposed bills for 2014-15 are around 20% higher than those in 1999-00 and 2009-10 mainly due to the investment needed to address security of supply.

CONCLUSION – THE OVERALL OUTCOME FOR CUSTOMERS

We have produced an integrated, well founded plan which has been endorsed by our Board of Directors. We have placed our customers at the heart of the process and believe that our plan delivers the benefits they want.

The foundation of our plan is maintaining compliance with drinking water and environmental standards, maintaining high levels of customer service and ensuring our customers have sufficient water. In addition to this we will deliver a relatively small programme of quality improvements and a small number of carefully justified service enhancements.

Since we submitted our draft plan, a number of factors outside our control have pushed bills upwards. These include increases in taxation and rates and the impacts of the economic recession. In assessing the costs arising from these changes, we have taken a balanced view, incorporating in our plan central estimates of the costs we will incur.

We believe we have taken a balanced view of risk throughout our plan, ensuring bills are no higher than they need to be. As well as always including central estimates, there are a number of assumptions we have made with significant risk. These include our assumption about the impact of the economic recession on revenue, where reductions in industrial demand could easily be much greater than we have forecast, and our decision to use a cost of capital towards the lower end of the potential range.

Despite the increases, our bills in Essex & Suffolk will continue to be relatively low considering the investment required to maintain water supplies in this dry part of the country. We believe our plan represents excellent value for money and will allow the company to continue to deliver top class services. By 2014-15 households will pay on average (2007/08 prices):

53p per day for water services in Essex & Suffolk