

Our business model

How we respond to challenges

How our responsible approach has helped us make a difference during the COVID-19 pandemic

How we responded

We serve some of England's most socioeconomically deprived communities, many of which have been severely impacted by COVID-19. We have prioritised supporting customers, the wider communities and our colleagues during this difficult time. Recognising the importance of water for public health and sanitation, especially with the emphasis placed on washing hands, we have maintained water supplies and wastewater services throughout the pandemic, keeping our employees safe while they carried out their duties.

Our communication with stakeholders during this time has been more important than ever, whether that has been encouraging customers to get in touch if they have been impacted financially by the pandemic or issuing guidance reinforcing government guidelines to protect employees, suppliers and customers. Our consultation for the Haweswater Aqueduct Resilience Programme (HARP) was stopped in its tracks by COVID-19. We changed approach, developed a virtual consultation, and as a result we have seen better engagement than our traditional approach.

Board oversight

COVID-19 has changed ways of working for everyone and our board has been no exception. We have continued to hold scheduled board meetings in a virtual format to ensure that the board's oversight has remained effective. We were able to hold a number of events during the year, including a board strategy day, conducting external board evaluation and providing our major shareholders with the opportunity to virtually meet with the Chairman.

Outlook

Lessons we have learnt from the pandemic will shape how we deliver for stakeholders in the future. We now have an even better understanding of our customers and how we can support them. We have been challenged to think more creatively about how we engage with our stakeholders. The pandemic has accelerated our digital strategy and changed our ways of working in such a way that we do not see a return to how we worked before.

Although there remains a degree of uncertainty as to how the UK and the economy will continue to recover after the pandemic, it has taught us that our sustainable and responsible approach to business means we can tackle future challenges as they emerge.

Our response at a glance

600,000

meals funded via local foodbanks

7,300

pupils supported via Home Learning Hub during school closures

67

apprentices and graduates recruited

Staff Outreach Scheme

supporting colleagues' struggling families

United Utilities response timeline





Communities

How we responded

We have continued to support young people in our region throughout the pandemic. Recruitment of apprentices and graduates has continued uninterrupted and we are supporting the Kickstart Scheme, offering training and meaningful work placements, with the support of our supply chain partners, to an initial 250 young people.

This year, as part of our ongoing charitable donations, we supported the FareShare charity in delivering 600,000 meals to struggling families via local foodbanks and replaced one of the charity's delivery vans, helping to ensure meals get to families in need over the next eight years.

During school closures our education team created a Home Learning Hub, providing teachers and children with home schooling material.



Customers

How we responded

Recognising affordability has been even more important during the pandemic, we took swift action and were the first company to secure support and regulatory approval for an extension to our social tariff, with an additional £15 million available to help customers keep out of debt.

We are committed to providing over £71 million of financial support over AMP7, and we have accelerated payments this year to provide much needed assistance to struggling households.

We have increased the extensive financial assistance we already provide, for instance by widening eligibility for our 'Back on Track' social tariff.



Employees

How we responded

We facilitated home working for over 3,000 of our employees with the remainder of our workforce continuing to work at COVID-secure facilities.

A huge focus has been on the wellbeing needs of our colleagues, in particular mental health support. We have delivered initiatives to help build resilience across our workforce, including e-learning and bitesize webinars.

We have not furloughed any employees, but, recognising that our employees and their families have not been immune to the hardships as a result of changing circumstances, we created a Staff Outreach Scheme to provide one-off grants through a confidential application process.



Environment

How we responded

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are determined to play our part in supporting a green recovery in the North West. We have accelerated investment plans, spending more over the early years of AMP7 than our original business plan. This will support recovery to build a greener, more sustainable future, all while helping the region to recover from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our new investment plans include delivering environmental improvements in rivers, protecting habitats, combating invasive species, enhancing water quality, drainage and reducing pollution. This investment will generate lasting benefits for the environment, for customers and for communities.



Investors

How we responded

Throughout the pandemic we have maintained regular contact through calls and video calls with both existing and new investors. This year we offered our major shareholders the opportunity to meet, albeit virtually, with the Chairman as part of our active investor relations programme.

We hosted our first virtual capital markets day in March, allowing us to share updates with our investor community on developments within our business. This year focused on key areas of value creation – innovation and Systems Thinking, customer service, totex and financing.



Suppliers

How we responded

We have continued to work closely and actively engage with our supply chain during the pandemic. Looking out for the health, safety and wellbeing of our suppliers has been as important to us as that of our employees.

We continued with the majority of our construction programme throughout the national lockdowns, supporting our supply chain partners.

We acted swiftly at the beginning of the pandemic to accelerate payments from 14 days down to seven days to help with cash flow and offered a range of payment options.

