

APPENDIX H

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

In this appendix, we outline how we communicate with our customers, stakeholders, and partners during drought or periods of high demand. We explain our flexible, research-led approach and how we adapt our messaging as conditions change. We summarise the channels we use, the key messages linked to each drought trigger level, and how we tailor information for different audience groups. We also highlight our work with regional partners to ensure consistent messaging, and we include example customer communications along with how we assess the effectiveness of our activities.

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1 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Groundwater levels are monitored daily at our observation borehole which gives an indication of the GW levels across our area. This information is reviewed at our weekly operations meetings. Should we identify that the groundwater trend indicates the drought risk is increasing and moving towards the Level 1 trigger we will keep a watching brief on the water resources situation ready to convene the Drought Event Management Group and put our communications strategy into play as appropriate.

1.1 Agile Communications

We will deploy an agile and proactive communication plan to connect with customers, other water companies, water retailers, the Environment Agency, the Government and many other stakeholders. We will tailor our communications to the situation at the time considering groundwater levels, rainfall, environmental conditions, customer demand for water and the time of the year. We will also adapt our messages and how we communicate these to the specific audiences identified in this section of our Drought Plan. We will use and elevate existing communication channels and open new ones, to cascade information about the water shortage we are experiencing. As the drought progresses we will scale our communications proportionately and to request customers to observe water saving measures, and to inform them of the additional drought measures we will be implementing.

1.2 Communication Plan

Proactive communication plays an essential role in managing drought and is a key aspect to any action we undertake.

The nature of any particular drought is unique in terms of its extent, duration and severity. This means we will need to deploy a Communication Plan in an agile way, so that we can best respond to the particular drought characteristics being experienced. Therefore, we have given much consideration to different communication approaches and channels, so that we can swiftly produce a plan that is best suited to the particular drought being experienced.

Several factors inform our Communication Plan. We draw from collaborative working and research to gain a better understanding of our customers and their opinions and preferences. We also work to continually improve our practices based on lessons learned from previous drought events. Together, these factors work to create an effective communication plan.

Two major pieces of research have been conducted since the previous drought plan was created in 2022. This research has been used to improve and further develop guidance for communication plan development at Portsmouth Water, in a focused manner based on customer feedback. These include:

South East Water Company's Drought Plan Research by the company Explain, supported by WRSE. This an excellent example of collaborative working and research carried out across the region on drought matters. This research combined qualitative and quantitative methods to understand customers' lived experience of severe drought, their preferences for demand- and supply-side actions, and the most effective communication approaches across drought stages. The findings have been

used to shape the tone, targeting, channels, timing and content of drought communications set out in this Appendix.

Customer research demonstrated that severe drought conditions are experienced as highly challenging, particularly in relation to maintaining hygiene, preparing food, caring for children, and managing health conditions. Our communications will explicitly acknowledge these challenges, balancing urgency with reassurance, and focusing on practical, achievable actions rather than abstract messaging.

Further research was conducted for Portsmouth Water by Blue Marble Research since the last drought plan. This was conducted to gain a better understanding of Portsmouth Water customer support for drought plan measures amongst other objectives.

The findings of the customer research carried out to inform updates to this communications plan are included as Annexes to Appendix A.

In addition to research and collaboration, implementing updates and improvements based on lessons learned from previous drought events has also been essential to the development of an effective communication plan. The summer of 2022 drought event, in particular, provides a great opportunity to improve communication practices. The lessons learned from the summer of 2022 drought event were detailed by the EA, through the National Drought Group, in April 2023¹. In addition, further recommendations based on the 2022 drought event were made by UKWIR in 2023².

Through exploring both customer research and lessons learned since the last drought event, several themes were identified. These included:

- Using a multi-channel approach to communicate drought messaging effectively to customers. Research findings highlighted that no single communication channel is trusted or accessed by all customers. A multi-channel approach is therefore essential, combining digital channels (social media, email, SMS), traditional media (TV, radio, press), and out-of-home messaging to maximise reach and reinforce messages across customer groups.
- Producing communication, which is simple, informative and balanced to increase the effectiveness of messaging. This learning point aligned well with the Explain research finding that customers consistently underestimated water use and valued concrete examples (e.g. litres per activity, simple swaps).
- Focusing on increasing available data for better management and understanding of water consumption.
- Increase focus on communicating more effectively with certain audience groups based on customer feedback and concerns.
- Considering changes or updates to the phased “Trigger level” approach.

¹ “Recommendations to improve drought preparation, management and response” – circulated in April 2023 by the National Drought Group led by the Environment Agency

² “Managing through Drought: Code of Practice and Guidance for Water Companies on Water Use Restrictions 2023” – Draft version sent on 30th June 2023 by UKWIR

- Continuation of Cross Region Collaboration with WRSE.

These themes have been used within this drought plan to create actions points which have been considered in the creation of the communication plan. The core findings from both the customer research and the lessons learned from the 2022 drought event can be found in Table 1. Here the findings have been integrated together and separated into the themes identified above. Action points, which will be considered as part of the communication plan, have then been identified to ensure each of the core findings have been addressed and informs on how we expect these actions will improve the communication plan overall.

In addition to the improvements and updates suggested in Table 1, throughout a drought, we will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our communications and assess the impact of each action we take before applying further measures. We will also ensure that any areas for improvement are implemented immediately where possible and included in the post drought review, so we continually improve our management of drought episodes.

Table 1 Integrated findings from customer research and lessons learned, with suggested actions to include in this drought plan.

| Action Taken in This Drought Plan | Source | Points Addressed/Core Findings | How will this improve the plan? |
|--|---|--|--|
| Using a multi-channel approach to communicate drought messaging effectively to customers. | | | |
| <p>1. Increasing the use of digital communication. Primarily through increasing social media presence in this communication plan with the help of our Communications and Marketing Manager. Also continuing to use other forms of communication such as email. This is included in the phased communication approach in Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> <p>2. .</p> <p>An example of the email communication we would send out at Trigger Level 1, can be found in section 1.4</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Widespread lack of customer awareness of personal water consumption despite strong concern over severe drought. - Willingness to act increased with age. 18–24-year-olds were the least likely to engage in water-saving behaviours. - Younger respondents favoured social media. - Older respondents preferred email. - Using a multi-channel approach particularly through social media and Out of Home Advertising (OOH)- referred to as public space in the customer research, was considered effective. | <p>This will increase customer awareness though continuing and increasing the utilisation of a multi-channel approach to communication. This will promote water efficiency and drought messaging to a wider customer base, aiming to improve on the plan completed in 2022 and demand campaigns more generally.</p> <p>This hopes to engage with younger audiences who were shown as least likely to engage with water-saving behaviour by using their preferred method of communication (social media). Whilst also continuing with other forms of digital communication such as email for older audiences.</p> |
| <p>3. Gaining a better understanding on lead times for paid for methods of advertising such Out Of Home (OOH) advertising and other forms of advertising. Factoring this knowledge into communications strategies and timelines.</p> <p>On a more regional or national level, PW focuses on coordination with other companies with regards to TV advertising. Encouraging coordination between different water companies.</p> <p>This is included in the phased communication approach in Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> <p>.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TV advertising was the preferred method of communication overall. - Using a multi-channel approach particularly through social media and OOH was emphasised as important. | <p>This would further the implementation of a multi-channel approach and improve demand campaigns using paid for advertising. Paid for advertising could broadly be divided into two groups to maximise effectiveness: PW only and regional/national approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PW only advertising could focus on methods such as OOH e.g. bus stops and other ‘6 sheet’ advertising locations such as supermarkets or shopping centres. OOH was deemed as important through public research and could aid in PW messaging within the area. Local radio could also be used for advertising. - On a more regional or national level, TV advertising, which was deemed as the preferred method of communication overall, would be most effectively used. <p>The effectiveness of paid for advertising will be increased from the previous drought plan through an increase in understanding surrounding implementation times of these communication methods, allowing those methods to be used in a timely manner to increase effectiveness of drought messaging. Also, through regional/national approaches like TV, coordination between companies would be encouraged. Providing a consistent message.</p> |

Producing communication, which is simple, informative and balanced to increase the effectiveness of messaging.

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| <p>4. Focus on simple and easier to understand messaging. Educating and informing the public with practical long-term water saving guidance. We will focus on ensuring that the messaging is clear and action focused, finding a balance between urgency and reassurance. We could also consider setting up a dedicated drought inbox to directly answer specific questions.</p> <p>This is included in the phased communication approach in Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> <p>.</p> <p>An example of communication we would send out Trigger Level 1 can be seen in section 1.4. This could be expanded on further considering the customer feedback.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <p>Effective communication seen as core to implementing water savings. Maximising engagement with customers through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and action focused messaging. - Mixed tone strategy, balancing urgency with reassurance. <p>- Customers favoured regional approaches for simplicity. Company-specific measures supported restrictions only being implemented when necessary.</p> <p>- Education was viewed as very important to change behaviour. Customers want simple and practical guidance to support long-term water saving. Including education on alternative water sources.</p> | <p>This seeks to maximise customer engagement and improve on the communication plan through focusing on customer feedback. A focus on education aims to improve customer behaviours related to water saving and use, aiming to insight long term changes.</p> <p>Simplicity of messaging aims to reach as wide an audience as possible.</p> <p>In relation to the Blue Marble Research, an increase in simple and informative messaging aims to achieve two things. Firstly, further improve on the positives from the research through improving customers awareness of the importance of saving water, the water stress of the region, and water supply and demand issues.</p> <p>Secondly, improving understanding on how to balance water supply and demand. Specifically, to an older audience through continuing to communicate using a multi-channel approach as mentioned above. Also highlighting the importance of water saving in terms of drought through educating on potential impacts to hopefully help customers understand the importance of taking action without the need for a drought to be active within the region. For any questions customers have that have not been answered using our communication, a dedicated drought inbox could be set up to provide support and information, increasing reassurance.</p> |
| <p>5. Include practical water saving tips within communication. This has been included in example mail correspondence. See section 1.4</p> <p>This is included in the phased communication approach in Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> <p>.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <p>- Practical Water saving tips were considered the most effective messaging. Followed by cost-saving advice and updates on drought severity.</p> | <p>This aims to provide customers with simple and practical ways that they can improve their water consumption. These practices could then be implemented into the customers day-to-day life, in sighting long term changes in water consumption.</p> |

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| <p>6. Consider a partnership between PW and environmental charities to deliver messaging.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a preference for messages to be delivered by a credible and trusted public figure, in the context of overall lower trust in water companies and the government. - Research found that environmental charities were well trusted. - Customer research indicated varying levels of trust in water companies and government as messengers. Communications will therefore, where appropriate and feasible, be delivered or reinforced in partnership with trusted third parties such as environmental charities and regional bodies, to improve credibility and engagement. | <p>This aims to increase trust with customers by presenting key messaging in partnership with groups which are well trusted by the public whilst also emphasising the importance of the environment to PW.</p> |
| <p>Focusing on increasing available data for better management and understanding of consumption.</p> | | | |
| <p>7. Focus on increasing the spread of smart metering across the supply area. The spread of usage has increased since the last drought plan in 2022.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> <p>“Recommendations to improve drought preparation, management and response” – circulated in April 2023 by the National Drought Group led by the Environment Agency</p> <p>“Managing through Drought: Code of Practice and Guidance for Water Companies on Water Use Restrictions 2023” – Draft version sent on 30th June 2023 by UKWIR</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of severe drought was high generally (nearly 9/10 participants). - Awareness was stronger in metered households. - Widespread lack of customer awareness of personal water consumption despite strong concern over severe drought. - At present, we do not have the levels of smart metering required to monitor and manage consumption at a daily level. - The need to improve campaign effectiveness. <p>The UKWIR suggested considering drought mitigation and responses taken by other countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For example, both Australia and South Africa focus on data transparency and collection. - Australia uses the Australia Drought Monitor which monitors drought indicators such as rainfall, evapotranspiration, soil moisture, vegetation (NDVI) providing them as a public dashboard in the form of maps, increasing trust with stakeholders and showing the data which informs decision making. - South Africa uses the Agricultural Drought Early Warning System to provide real-time alerts based on rainfall, vegetation stress and crop/grazing conditions. Although more alert-focused than Australia, it works to provide information across stakeholders allowing for early action and can also be used for awareness campaigns and training. | <p>Increasing the use of smart metering across the network to manage and monitor water consumption will aid in campaign effectiveness by increasing awareness of severe drought, which has already been shown to be higher in metered households. This would also be especially helpful in evaluating the effect that the communication plan is having on reducing demand.</p> <p>Once the use of this metering is widespread it will provide real time PCC data to allow for more effective management and evaluation of communication strategies. Although different data from other countries, it would help increase the data we have and allow for more localised monitoring across the region, in a somewhat similar way to countries such as Australia and South Africa.</p> <p>This also allows for us to consider other data we may be able to collect in the future, possibly in a similar way to Australia and South Africa. It could also be used to inform targeted messaging to customers, especially during demand spikes and high demand scenarios. For example, informing customers as to how far above or below their consumption is to the average consumption or their previous usage, which would increase awareness of personal water consumption.</p> |
| <p>Increase focus on communicating more effectively with certain audience groups based on customer feedback and concerns.</p> | | | |
| <p>8. Inform groups related to vulnerable customers earlier in the drought timeline. For example, Citizens Advice Bureau could be informed at Level 1 This could also include considering partnerships with groups focused on providing support to vulnerable people.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was found that vulnerable customers were disproportionately affected by severe drought. Flexible water allowances based on household composition and clearer communication about eligibility for support was strongly supported. | <p>Currently, the Citizens Advice Bureau is informed at Level 2. A move to Level 1 (within Table 4) for this group will help to provide more information and reassurance to vulnerable groups, indicated through customer feedback as disproportionately affected by severe drought.</p> <p>This will build on the targeted messaging which directly informs vulnerable customers as indicated in Table 3 Our indicative drought management</p> |

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| <p>Targeted messaging to vulnerable groups is included in the phased communication approach in Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> | | | <p>and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.</p> <p>Communications will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly explain eligibility and support Avoid stigma Use accessible formats and proactive contact |
| <p>9. Inform Environmental charities earlier in drought development. Perhaps at Level 1 instead of Level 3.</p> | <p>WRSE, Drought Plan Research, February 2026</p> | <p>- Environmental charities and local wildlife groups were well trusted.</p> | <p>Customer feedback highlighted the importance of environmental charities and their association with being well trusted by the public. Currently, these groups are informed at Level 3, however moving this to Level 1 shows our willingness to engage with environmental causes to ensure these groups are informed in a timely manner.</p> |
| <p>Consider changes or updates to the phased “Trigger level” approach.</p> | | | |
| <p>10. Consider the use of internal triggers set above level 1. Although we have not decided to implement this change as part of this drought plan, more informal triggers will be used internally before level one during demand spikes.</p> | <p>“Recommendations to improve drought preparation, management and response” – circulated in April 2023 by the National Drought Group led by the Environment Agency</p> <p>“Managing through Drought: Code of Practice and Guidance for Water Companies on Water Use Restrictions 2023” – Draft version sent on 30th June 2023 by UKWIR</p> | <p>- Increasing the effectiveness of drought triggers and the ability to manage drought through considering internal triggers above level 1.</p> <p>The UKWIR suggested considering drought mitigation and responses taken by other countries:</p> <p>- Spain differs from the UK in communication and drought management practices using a structured scenario framework, including Pre-alert, Alert and Emergency phases which are based on water storage, demand forecasts and probability models.</p> | <p>This could make drought triggers, thresholds and actions more robust, flexible and agile especially before level 1, thus improving customer communication, service updates, drought preparation and management. In a similar vein to Spain’s pre-alert system.</p> <p>Although this will not be used as a formal trigger in this plan, it will still help as an internal and informal trigger to highlight when certain actions should be considered prior to the start of a level 1 drought event. This helps to put a focus on early intervention. An example of where this process has been implemented was during the summer of 2025, for example, where PW enhanced communications following prolonged dry weather despite not hitting level 1.</p> |
| <p>Continuation of Cross Region Collaboration with WRSE</p> | | | |
| <p>11. Continue to engage with the WRSE to collaborate with other water companies in the region. Table 8 highlights engagement with WRSE and at which level or drought trigger WRSE becomes more involved in coordinating cross-region approaches. More focus on establishing agreed method and frequency of communication during water shortages between other water companies, NAVs and retailers.</p> | <p>“Managing through Drought: Code of Practice and Guidance for Water Companies on Water Use Restrictions 2023” – Draft version sent on 30th June 2023 by UKWIR</p> | <p>- Establishing an agreed method and frequency of communication during water shortages between the relevant parties such as water companies, NAVs and retailers.</p> <p>- Improving communication plans so they can better react to manage and communicate the drought situation.</p> | <p>This aims to continue to the collaborative approach taken by PW in terms of coordinating cross-region approaches to drought planning, especially in severe droughts.</p> |

1.2.1 Implementation

The Head of Marketing and Comms has the responsibility for implementing communications with customers. This will happen when it looks likely our first drought trigger will be breached.

As stated above, we will be working closely with other water companies in the WRSE which may need to start communicating about water shortages in their area before we need to. In order to ensure a joined-up approach, we will also activate parts of our communication plan when any other company in the WRSE region needs to start raising awareness. WRSE also issues regional alerts when the collective risk level increases, helping companies coordinate preparedness and ensure consistent messaging across the region.

The reason why other neighbouring water companies in the wider south east region may start to experience water shortages is, in part due to where the water comes from. This is because the majority of our water sources come from groundwater, which takes longer to show the impacts of periods of low rainfall. This contrasts with neighbouring water companies that may rely more on reservoirs and surface water such as rivers, which reduce much more quickly in periods of reduced rainfall.

Therefore, we will work collaboratively with other organisations, from regulators to neighbouring companies and regional groups, to ensure a joined up and coordinated approach to the management of the drought. In particular, we will work closely with Southern Water, due to our existing water transfer agreements, to share information and understand their need for water during the drought.

Moreover, we will look to formally notify all our NAVs and retailers operating in our area of any change in our drought status levels and will be providing them with all the communications we send our customers. This would be done both to keep them and their customers informed, since we would be urging them to proactively relay that information to their customers through their own communication channels. Working with Retailers in particular there is an opportunity to influence large commercial users of water alongside our household customers.

1.2.2 Key messages and delivery methods

The messages used and the method of delivery will be dependent upon the severity and specifics of the situation, as stated above. Nevertheless, the key information we will communicate across our supply area will include:

- The current drought risk and how this could impact future supply;
- The key reasons for the water shortage;
- The actions taken by the Company to date;
- What people can do at home and what actions business can take, and how this helps to save water and protect the environment;
- What may happen in the future should the drought worsen, with regard to water use restrictions; and
- How people can find out more information and advice.

We will ensure customer facing staff in our call centre and others, are well briefed and able to respond to enquiries about the water shortage and restrictions. We will

consider extending the opening hours of our Customer Service centre for the initial period following the publication of the water use restrictions to ensure we are able to best respond to enquiries.

Our communications strategy has been informed by key reports on communicating during droughts, including the following which were produced after the 2011-2012 drought:

- Consumer Council for Water’s (2013) “[Understanding drought and resilience](#)”;
- Waterwise’s (2013) “[Water Efficiency and Drought Communications](#)”;
- UKWIR’s (2013) “[Managing through drought: code of practice and guidance for water companies on water use restrictions](#)”; and
- Accent (2021) Regional Drought Communications Research Project.

The strategy in this plan has been further informed by reports produced after the 2022 drought event, as previously highlighted:

- “Recommendations to improve drought preparation, management and response” – circulated in April 2023 by the National Drought Group led by the Environment Agency.
- “Managing through Drought: Code of Practice and Guidance for Water Companies on Water Use Restrictions 2023” – Draft version sent on 30th June 2023 by UKWIR.

Table 2 shows the large range of communication methods and channels we could use to reach as customers and stakeholder groups as effectively as possible. This list is provided to illustrate the range available to us but we would implement the necessary measures based on the local, regional and national situation at the time.

Table 2 The communication methods and channels to be used for drought messaging.

| Communication channel | Communication activity / reach (depending on the drought severity) |
|---|--|
| Our website | Information in the form of text, pictures, articles, and videos to inform staff and customers on the water shortage, and what customers can do. |
| Our social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, Instagram), and relevant others | <p>Information in the form of text, pictures, articles, and videos to inform staff and customers on the water shortage, and what customers can do.</p> <p>Paid advertisements.</p> <p>Content distribution to local social media community groups across our supply area to extend reach of our content.</p> |
| Direct customer communications (Email and SMS) | Information in the form of text, pictures, and links to videos to inform customers directly about the water shortage and what people can do to help, or any water use restrictions. This could also provide links to the Portsmouth Water podcast: Dive into Drought. See section 1.4. |
| Local Press (for example the Portsmouth News) | <p>Press releases and availability of PW spokespeople issued to local press to encourage articles on the water shortage and what people can do to help, or any water use restrictions.</p> <p>Official notices about water use restrictions.</p> <p>Paid advertisements.</p> |
| Local Radio and TV Stations | <p>Press releases and availability of PW spokespeople issued to local TV and radio to encourage in-person interviews and news segments appealing for people to use water wisely. Briefings on the water scarcity situation.</p> <p>Paid advertisements to be played regularly on local radio.</p> <p>TV advertising to be considered alongside other regional water companies.</p> |
| Stakeholder Briefing | Regular updates to the Environment Agency, Natural England, Local Authorities, Consumer Council for |

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| | Water, Members of Parliament, Trade Associations, Local Resilience Forums, NAVs and Retailers |
| Posters in public buildings (e.g. doctors, surgeries, libraries), electronic displays and billboards, messages on the side of fleet vehicles– Out of Home (OOH) advertising. | Key messages about the drought and helpful actions to take for people out and about. |
| Information with bills | Inclusion of information about the water shortage in the magazine that accompanies customer bills, and what actions they can take |
| Internal briefing notes | Information about the drought for Customer Services and Production staff to keep them informed of the developing situation so they can better undertake their duties |
| E-mail postscripts | Key messages about the drought and helpful actions to take for customers and contractors |

1.2.3 Phased approach and audience groups

Our communication with customers will follow a phased approach linked to our drought trigger levels (section **Error! Reference source not found.**). This helps to ensure that we step up our communication with our customers and stakeholders in tandem with increasing severity of a drought episode. The draft Drought Plan provides a summary of the communication activities for each drought triggers, and Table 3 provides further details. These activities provide an indicative approach, however we aim to maintain operational flexibility where we may adopt elements of it, implement it in full or modify the approach based on what we feel would be most effective during the specific event.

Research carried out with WRSE showed that customers respond best when education and practical guidance begin early, before severe restrictions are required. The phased communication approach therefore emphasises early, informative messaging at lower trigger levels, with increased urgency and targeting as drought severity escalates.

Table 8 sets out different groups or audiences that we will try and reach during drought to alert them to the need to reduce their demand for water. The individual or groups may be affected by water shortages either directly or would benefit from information and advice to pass onto others. Each group will need a tailored approach to ensure that they receive useful information.


While we may not be a supplier of water to certain individuals or groups listed, such as farmers or businesses, it is recognised that communication with these groups is useful and can generate wider benefits. During 2025, the National Drought Group (NDG) Agriculture sub-group, and the MOSL group for Non-Households were an effective way to keep these groups informed of the water resource situation.

It is important to note that we believe that none of the drought scenarios considered in this Plan would affect the provision of water for firefighting supplies. Only an unprecedented occurrence such as a major pollution event during a severe drought would pose such a risk, and in this case Portsmouth Water would communicate with the Fire Brigade as per the Emergency Plan.

Table 3 Our indicative drought management and communication activities for each drought trigger level, management action and communication activities.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| Drought Plan Guideline | BAU - routine demand management | Voluntary demand reductions; enhanced leakage; optimising existing sources | TUBs (with exemptions); Drought Permits / Orders with minor environmental impacts | TUBs (without exemptions), NEUBs; Drought Permits / Orders with moderate environmental impacts; Further voluntary demand reductions | Extreme actions to delay emergency drought options (including level 3b demand management); drought orders and permits with major environmental impacts | Post-Drought Recovery |
| | Normal | Prolonged dry weather | Drought | Severe Drought | | Post-Drought |
| | Green | Yellow | Amber | Red | | The journey back to green |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3a | 3b | PD |
| Drought Management Action | None | Close Monitoring of Water Resources and Enhanced Leakage Control. Commencement of enhanced Drought Plan Communications | Imposition of restrictions: Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) for domestic customers | Application and imposition of restrictions: - Non-essential Use Bans (NEUBs) - Application of Drought Permits (DPs) | Drought Permit Extreme Drought Options | None |
| Key Messaging and Communication Activity | | | | | | |
| Key Messages | - Usual Messaging in non-drought situations. - Highlight the importance of using water wisely. | - There is a national water shortage- how much does the rainfall differ from average? - What has PW done to help during this dry period- actively finding and fixing leaks, increasing number of leakage technicians. How many leaks have they fixed? - Are we anticipating implementing restrictions? Urge customers to use water wisely even if restrictions are not anticipated. - How many regions are currently in drought? How does this period compare historically? - Emphasise the pressure on public water supply and environment. - Water saving tips. - Tailor messages to reflect levels of customer demand compared to averages for the time of year. | - Overall increase in communication. - Explaining the temporary ban, providing information particularly on how it will affect customers. - Providing updates on drought development. | - Further increase in communication and messaging. - Targeted Messaging. | - Emphasis on thanking customers for doing their bit. - Moving back towards normal conditions. - However, highlight that the climate is changing and the population is growing so continuing to use water wisely is important. - Emphasise importance of continuing to use water wisely. - Emphasis on thanking customers for doing their bit. - Moving back towards normal conditions. - However, highlight that the climate is changing and the population is growing so continuing to use water wisely is important. - Emphasise importance of continuing to use water wisely. | |

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| <p>General Drought Communication Activity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will deploy our usual customer-orientated water efficiency messages, which include options for customers to have free water saving devices to be fitted; tips for saving water, access to discounted rain butts etc; and having a water meter installed. - We will include updates on the water resources situation at regular meetings with the Environment Agency. - Event Sponsorship/Attendance - Water saving tips. | <p>Key Messages, plus additional activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will appeal to customers to ask for their help to use water wisely. We will explain that we are experiencing a water shortage and why this is happening in terms of reduced rainfall and the impact on our water supplies. It will include the area affected and what actions we are doing to save water. - We will ask customers to report leaks promptly. - We will send bespoke messages to customers in areas of the network which may experience shortage or low pressure first, such as Bognor. - We will engage with regulators, WRSE and regional or national drought groups over the water resource position, and collaborative actions (including external comms). - We will reach out early with light touch messaging with wider stakeholders (see Table 4) on the developing water shortage, explaining the situation and possible future water use restrictions. We will provide updates to the Environment Agency on the Water Resource position in meetings and explain actions we are taking. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will step-up communications to all customers, building on what has already been expressed, updating them on the water resource situation and what we need to do now to further save water in the form of certain restrictions. - We will explain what other actions we are doing to save water (enhanced leakage find and fix, using new or different water sources, protecting the environment). - We will explain how customers will be affected by the impositions of temporary use bans, and how this will help us all save water; where customers can find more information, and what further actions they can do to save water. - We will ensure targeted messaging to customers in areas of the network which may experience particular issues. - We will directly liaise with neighbouring companies over water transfer arrangements. - We will continue our engagement with regulators, WRSE and regional or national drought groups. - We will have a presence at areas where people gather (e.g. retail areas) and events to promote awareness and water saving initiatives. - We will continue to provide updates on drought development in regular meetings with the Environment Agency (and via email) and discuss upcoming drought permit application where appropriate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional communication to customers and stakeholders on the imposition of further restrictions and using hosepipe. - We will reprise our direct contact with vulnerable customers to personally advise them of the situation to ensure they are fully informed, and any concerns are addressed. - We will send targeted messages to customers which may be significantly affected by the non-essential use bans to ensure they understand the new water restriction. - We will advise customers in advance should we need to implement water flow pressure reductions. - We will continue to liaise with neighbouring companies over any changes to water transfer arrangements, and the application of Drought Orders or Permits. - We will communicate with environmental groups and other licence holders about the application for a Drought Order / Permit, explaining the reasons why we are doing this, the powers it gives us, and the subsequent implications. - We will continue our frequent engagement with regulators, the WRSE group, and other regional or national drought groups. - We will continue frequent meetings with Environment Agency to update on drought development. This is likely to involve discussions about drought permit applications prepared. - Additional communication to customers and stakeholders on the imposition of further restrictions and using hosepipe. - We will reprise our direct contact with vulnerable customers to personally advise them of the situation to ensure they are fully informed, and any concerns are addressed. - We will send targeted messages to customers which may be significantly affected by the non-essential use bans to ensure they understand the new water restriction. - We will advise customers in advance should we need to implement water flow pressure reductions. - We will continue to liaise with neighbouring companies over any changes to water transfer arrangements, and the application of Drought Orders or Permits. - We will communicate with environmental groups and other licence holders about the application for a Drought Order / Permit, explaining the reasons why we are doing this, the powers it gives us, and the subsequent implications. - We will continue our frequent engagement with regulators, the WRSE group, and other regional or national drought groups. - We will continue frequent meetings with Environment Agency to update on drought development. This is likely to involve discussions about drought permit applications prepared. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on thanking customers for doing their bit. - Moving back towards normal conditions. - However, highlight that the climate is changing and the population is growing so continuing to use water wisely is important. <p>Emphasis on continuing with water saving measures- integrating them into everyday life/long term.</p> |
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| <p>Communication with Different Audience Groups</p> | <p>- Continuation of our business as usual strategy</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need to consider how we adapt our messaging and information in order to effectively reach different target audiences. - The information presented should be in line with the key messaging and urgency level of communications throughout drought levels. - In general, our communication will be simple and informative. If appropriate, we will make direct contact with vulnerable customers to personally advise them of the situation to ensure they are fully informed, and any concerns are addressed. - However, our messaging should be tailored to individual groups where possible. This should be in line with the trigger level at which a group should be reached, shown in Table 4. - This should continue through all trigger levels. <p>For Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For vulnerable customers there will be a focus on connecting with groups which can provide support. For example, Citizens Advice Bureau which will be informed at Level 1, rather than Level 2 previously. <p>For environmental organisations the focus may be on providing detailed information on what we are doing to continue to protect the environment during the drought.</p> | | | | |
| Communication Channels | | | | | | |
| <p>Digital channels</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usual communication with customers and presenting usual water efficiency communication activity (as stated above). - Organic and (and occasional Paid) social media - Targeted Direct to Customer Emails | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on increasing social media presence, increasing any paid social media activity and outreach into community groups. Launch other paid digital channels e.g. display advertising. Emails to full customer-base commence . As the drought progresses through trigger levels, messaging through digital channels becomes more frequent and urgent in terms of tone and style until post-drought. At serious drought levels, SMS messages to customers may also be considered. - Set up dedicated website pages with drought-related information beyond the usual water efficiency pages. As the drought progresses, the prominence of messaging on the Portsmouth Water website homepage will increase. - Consider setting up a dedicated drought inbox so that members of the public can directly ask us questions throughout every stage of the drought. <p>Present clear and simple information, key messages and drought communication activity for Level 1 (as stated above).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on communicating key messages for Level 2 (as stated above), in clear and simple terms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Present key messages and drought communication activity for Level 3a/b (as stated above), in clear and simple terms. - Customer online portal. <p>Continue to increase social media presence</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ramping down of communication. Moving back towards BAU activities in level 0. - Communication continues to thank customers for their support during the drought. | |

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| <p>Advertising via other channels.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usual communication with customers and presenting usual water efficiency communication activity (as stated above). - BAU Community Magazine Advertising - BAU Radio Advertising and Promotions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on implementing advertising through other methods as part of a multi-channel approach e.g. local press and radio. As the drought progresses through the trigger levels, messaging becomes more urgent until post-drought. - This will include Out of Home (such as outdoor poster sites). Also, customer SMS and door drops may be considered. - Present key messages and drought communication activity for level 1 (as stated above) in clear and simple terms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue advertising through methods such as OOH, mail, SMS and door drops introduced. - Focus on communicating key messages for Level 2 (as stated above) in clear and simple terms. - We would engage with joined company work with WRSE to develop consistent materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Present key messages and drought communication activity for Level 3a/b (as stated above) in clear and simple terms. <p>At this stage this continues to be company lead. However, as the drought develops more regional and national led work would take place to ensure there is strong regional coordination and delivery support that is effective and adding value to drought response regionally.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ramping down of communication. Moving back towards BAU activities in level 0. - Communication continues to thank customers for their support during the drought |
| <p>Media</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usual communication with customers and presenting usual water efficiency communication activity (as stated above). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on Implementing advertising through radio, press and digital communication methods. <p>As we move through drought triggers, we will prepare press releases and briefings for local media including press, radio and TV. Spokespeople available for interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Present key messages and drought communication activity for Level 1 (as stated above) in clear and simple terms. - WRSE will reference and promote this work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on communicating key messages for Level 2 (as stated above). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Present key messages and drought communication activity for Level 3a/b (as stated above). <p>As more extreme drought conditions develop - more regional/national led with centralised regional coordination to support messaging and engagement.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - |
| <p>Public Polling</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public polling could be conducted to gain insight into public opinion and understanding. This polling could be conducted through web pop up polls or direct communication through email supplying a link to polling. This polling could continue through the drought trigger levels to assess how we are doing. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public polling moves more towards assessing how we did throughout the whole drought process and how we could improve- a reflective exercise. <p>Move back towards BAU activities.</p> |

Table 4 The different audience groups to be reached for each drought trigger level during drought escalation and subsequent recovery from the peak of the drought.

| Group | Individuals and organisations that may be affected by droughts and water use restrictions (not exhaustive) | L e v e l 0 | L e v e l 1 | L e v e l 2 | L e v e l 3 | Recovery from Drought |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Employees | Employees and contractors | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Customers and Stakeholders | Domestic customers | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Commercial customers | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Citizens Advice Bureau | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Housing Associations | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Retailers | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Priority Services Register customers | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Regulators | Environment Agency | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Ofwat | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Defra | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Drinking Water Inspectorate | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Natural England | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Water industry groups | Consumer Council for Water | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Waterwise | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Customer Challenge Group | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Water UK | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Southern Water | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |

| Group | Individuals and organisations that may be affected by droughts and water use restrictions (not exhaustive) | Level 0 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Recovery from Drought |
|---|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| Water companies | WRSE | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | All | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Environmental, landscape, heritage, and other relevant interest groups | Local wildlife groups and campaign groups | | | | Y | Y |
| | Conservation volunteer groups | | | | Y | Y |
| | Local Friends of the Earth | | | | Y | Y |
| | South East Rivers Trust | | | | Y | Y |
| | WWF | | | | Y | Y |
| | RSPB | | | | Y | Y |
| | CPRE | | | | | Y |
| | English Heritage | | | | | Y |
| Sports and leisure groups | Angling Trust | | | | Y | Y |
| | Canal & Rivers Trust | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | River Trust | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Angling clubs | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Canoe clubs | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Sailing clubs | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Local fishing groups | | | | Y | Y |
| | Ramblers Association and other walking groups | | | | Y | Y |
| | Professional sports clubs | | | | Y | Y |

| Group | Individuals and organisations that may be affected by droughts and water use restrictions (not exhaustive) | Level 0 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Recovery from Drought |
|--|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| Authorities and service providers | MPs | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Local Authorities | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Town Councils | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Parish councils | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Local Resilience Forums | | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Health Authorities | | | | Y | Y |
| | Police Service | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Fire Service | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Coastguard and RNLi | | | | | Y |
| Representative bodies | Residents' associations | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Confederation of British Industry | | | | Y | Y |
| | National Farmers Union | | | | Y | Y |
| | Chambers of Trade and Commerce | | | | Y | Y |
| | Countryside Landowners and Business Association | | | | Y | Y |
| | Horticultural Trades Association | | | | Y | Y |
| | Window Cleaners Trade Associations | | | | Y | Y |
| | Federation of Small Businesses | | | | Y | Y |

| Group | Individuals and organisations that may be affected by droughts and water use restrictions (not exhaustive) | L e v e l | | | | Recovery from Drought |
|---|--|-----------|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| | Grounds Management Association | | | Y | Y | Y |
| | Age UK | | | Y | Y | Y |
| Local community focused institutions and organisations | Hospitals | | | | Y | Y |
| | Schools | | | | Y | Y |
| | Residential Care Homes | | | | Y | Y |
| | Faith groups | | | | Y | Y |
| | Youth clubs | | | | Y | Y |
| | Age-based groups | | | Y | Y | Y |

1.2.4 Additional communications that may be required

1.2.4.1 Communications for Environmental Drought

In situations under which there is adverse impact on the environment due to drought, but the drought has not developed to be severe enough to be a threat to public water supply, there may be benefit from reductions in customer demand. In such circumstances we may work with the Environment Agency and other stakeholders to communicate with our customers to request that they take steps to increase water efficiency and reduce their water consumption. We would use similar means of communication as in situations where reduced consumption is required to reduce the impacts on water supply, but the messaging would be different with the focus being on the potential to benefit the environment.

1.2.4.2 Communications for High Demand or Outage

There may be a requirement to communicate with our customers to request that they take steps to reduce demand in circumstances where there is not a drought or a threat of drought. This could arise due to a period of high demand that puts stress on the water treatment or water distribution infrastructure, or it could be due to a period of outage at a water treatment works or a failure of a strategic main. Under such circumstances it would not be appropriate to implement drought measures to restrict demand such as implementation of a TUB as the situation would not have arisen due to an exceptional shortage of rain.

Therefore, the implementation of a tailored communications campaign is the best means of trying to achieve a reduction in customer demand in such circumstances and a short lived and targeted campaign using the most appropriate means of communications would be used in

these circumstances. It is likely that the use of social media and methods such as email could be used during a campaign of this type. This approach would also be used in a situation where unforeseen circumstances may occur such as in 2020 as a result of Covid19 which led to high demand in parts of our supply area which when coupled with very hot weather, led to stress on our operational network. In these circumstances it is necessary to mobilise a communications campaign quickly, this process is known as 'agile comms', which was proven to be successful in 2020 and again in 2025 in a period of particularly hot weather.

Although high demand will not be used as a formal drought trigger in this plan, it may help to inform messaging during high demand spikes in the future. For example, as smart metering becomes more widely spread across the region, this demand data could inform specifically targeted messaging to customers as mentioned in Table 1, and also provide feedback on the effectiveness of our communications campaign and other drought actions in aiming to reduce demand.

1.2.5 Effectiveness of our communications

We have in place quick and efficient monitoring of daily demand, which is used to assess usage during peak summer periods. Continuous monitoring of representative sample sets of households and non-household customers allow for robust analysis of changes in usage. This is currently used to forecast future demand. This same dataset would be used to monitor the effect of our communication campaigns during a period of drought.

We could also look at other measures of effectiveness including customer research, the numbers of times a link is used to access information on a website, the numbers of entries to competitions and the numbers of water saving devices requested through our 'Get Water Fit' programme.

The use of demand data, customer feedback, and smart-meter insights will enable quantitative evaluation of communication effectiveness, reflecting customer research findings that awareness and behaviour change are higher where usage is visible and understandable.

We would look to collaborate with other water companies and organisations, such as the Environment Agency, to share data, behaviours and lessons learned.

In addition to this, the Water Director of the EA, suggested during a January 2026 NDG that companies collect consistent data on their communications to enable a post-drought lessons learnt evaluation. To achieve this, a template for companies to record data has been sent through to us by WaterUK.

In the future, as mentioned in Table 1, an increase in smart metering in the region could eventually allow for more localised water consumption monitoring. Allowing us to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of our communication plan .

1.3 Regional Drought Collaboration

Portsmouth Water recognises that as a member of the water industry, we need to work collaboratively to share knowledge and best practice, co-ordinate and align communication to customers and stakeholders, and promote the efficient use of water resources.

We work closely with other water companies in our region as part of the WRSE group. For example, we participate in the regular WRSE "dry weather" meetings which focus the risk of any potential future water shortages. In these meetings all water companies share

information about their available water resources, weather forecasts, and any communication needed with customers about any emerging drought situation. These meetings are held all year round and stepped up in frequency when a risk of water shortages across the south east starts to emerge. The meetings facilitate collaboration between water companies and actions to ensure an effective regional response to a developing drought. As mentioned above, the WRSE has commissioned research covering the region, on customer awareness of drought matters and optimal communication approaches.

By working together and following a joined-up approach to communication, we aim to reduce confusion so our customers clearly understand the pressure on water supplies and the environment during water shortages, what we are doing, how they can use water wisely, and what water restrictions may need to be, or are being, imposed. The regional/national drought management communication actions we contribute to, led by WRSE, can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.**



In addition, we are active members of the UK-wide National Drought Group (NDG) Communications Subgroup collaborating with Defra communications, other water companies and communicators from other key national stakeholders through this forum. WRSE also undertakes joint regional drought scenario exercises and annual reviews of its dry-weather coordination framework, ensuring lessons learned are embedded and preparedness continues to improve across all member companies.

1.4 [Customer Communications Templates \(supporting material\)](#)

1.4.1 Example customer email (2025 draft template)

Figures 1 and 2 below show examples of an email and a direct mail water efficiency campaign that we would issue during emerging dry weather conditions upon reaching level 1. It reflects the simple, clear and action focused messaging outlined in this strategy and can be adapted as required. These examples were prepared ready to distribute if we reached groundwater level 1 in the summer of 2025.

Figure 1: Example customer email (2025 draft template)



Hi **[[title]] [[forename]] [[surname]]**.

England is experiencing a **national water shortage**. During the first six months of the year, Portsmouth Water customers saw **50% less rainfall** compared to the average measured over the last 30 years. Despite some downpours, as of today rainfall for the year is still **30% below** what we'd expect.

Time to Save Water

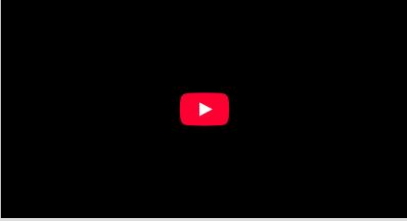
Although our groundwater level is 2 metres below the average measured over the last 30 years, we are not currently anticipating the need to implement any restrictions. To prevent the situation getting worse, we continue to urge you to use water wisely, spread the word about saving water and reuse water where you can.

We have repaired over 700 leaks in July and August. That's 22% more compared to the same time last year.

While we're always actively finding and fixing leaks, it's even more important during prolonged dry weather. This is because in drier ground, pipes naturally move and break to keep up with leak reports.

You can make a difference

By being mindful of the water we are using, and re-using water where we can, we can make a difference. Watch some creative ways to save water on our YouTube or [visit us online](#).



Podcast: Dive into Drought

Join our Head of Water Resources, Jim, and our Water resources manager, Liz to understand the nitty gritty of how dry weather turns into drought...

[Watch the podcast](#)

Thank you for helping us all save water and protect our water resources.

Best regards,
Jim Barker
Head of Water Resources
Portsmouth Water

[Learn how we're securing safe, reliable water for the future.](#)

This is an essential service message from Portsmouth Water. Find our privacy notice at portsmouthwater.co.uk/legal-notice

Figure 2: Example A5 Direct Mail (2025 draft template)

Portsmouth Water

TIME TO SAVE WATER

Despite recent showers, the South East has seen some of the driest weather on record.

Find water saving tips at portsmouthwater.co.uk/saving-water

Portsmouth Water

We have repaired over 700 leaks so far in July and August alone – a 22% increase on last year. While we're keeping your taps flowing, we need your help to use water wisely.

- **50% less rainfall in the first half of the year.** Despite recent showers, total rainfall still 30% below average and groundwater is low.
- **In drier ground, pipes naturally shift and break.** To maintain a quick response while we see increased leak reports, our repairs team is working 30% more.

Quick water saving tips

- 1 Reduce your shower time
- 2 Use a watering can, not a hose
- 3 Turn off the tap while brushing

SCAN ME

Find out ways you can save water:
portsmouthwater.co.uk/saving-water