



Vulnerability Strategy

June 2024

1. Introduction

Icosa Water recognise the importance of supporting our customers in their time of need. We all need a helping hand from time to time and we know that a change in circumstances can make someone more vulnerable whether its due to finances, health, a bereavement, or divorce. It can happen to any one of us at any time and we recognise that changes can be temporary or have longer term consequences.

Our aim is to ensure that customers who may be at a higher risk of financial or emotional harm are treated with care and sensitivity. The cost-of-living crisis is having an impact on everyone's lives, and we are committed in helping those who are feeling the greatest hardship and who need extra help and support.

Our staff are trained to recognise signs of vulnerability, such as cognitive impairments, mental health issues, financial struggles, or life events. This is identified through asking targeted questions during interactions with customers and maintaining a vulnerability/priority services register.

This strategy sets out what we will do to make sure our customers:

- have access to the range of services and support we provide.
- are supported when they need more help.

2. Priority Services Register

Customers can register for Priority Services by contacting us over the phone or filling in the online form on our website, which will give them additional assistance depending on the service they require.

By registering for our priority services customers can:

- Receive prior warning of planned work which may interrupt their water supply.
- Receive priority treatment should their water supply be interrupted (we aim to arrange an alternative supply as quickly as possible and will often hand deliver bottled water to customers with mobility issues).
- Receive information from us in a format better for them, such as large print, braille or spoken word.
- Register a password with us for our staff to use if we need to call to a customer's home.
- Nominate someone else to receive their bills, correspondence or to speak to on their behalf.

We have added a communication tool to our website to help customers with additional language needs where English is not their first language. The 'Translate' language tool can translate web pages using Google Chrome Extension for customers.

For customers with hearing and speech difficulties they can access 'Relay UK' to help them communicate with anyone over the phone.

Codes for PSR customers – shared throughout the utility companies.

Customer Class	Class Description	Grouping
BL	Blind	Communication
DF	Hearing Impairment	Communication
MH	Mental Health	Medically Dependant
YC	Families with young children<5	Transient
FL	Unable to communicate in English	Communication
TL	Temporary Life changes	Transient
DM	Dementia	Medically Dependant
KD	Dialysis	Medically Dependant
CI	Chronic/Serious illness	Medically Dependant
PM	Physical Impairment	Mobility
UA	Unable to answer door	Mobility
RH	Restricted Hand Movement	Mobility
PS	Partially Sighted	Communication
LD	Development condition	Communication
AP	Additional presence preferred	Safety
TP	Temporary – post hospital recovery	Transient
TY	Young adult house holder <18	Transient
SI	Speech Impairment	Communication
OP	Pensionable age	Transient
SM	Poor sense of smell	Safety
HL	Heart, Lung & Ventilator	Energy dependant
OC	Oxygen concentrator	Energy dependant
NB	Nebuliser & Apnoea monitor	Energy dependant
MD	MDE Electric showering	Medically Dependant
CT	Careline/telecare system	Energy dependant
MR	Medicine refrigeration	Energy dependant
BH	Stair lift, hoist, electric bed	Mobility
OU	Oxygen Use	Energy dependant

3. Financial Help

For customers who are experiencing short term or long-term financial hardship its important to approach the situation with empathy and understanding.

We can support customers by:

- Listening to them allowing them to share their struggles without judgement. We show empathy and let customers know that we understand their struggles.
- Offering alternative and flexible payment arrangements if required.
- Recommending the customer to the WaterSure Scheme where applicable.
- Offering practical assistance – signposting customers to charities and government programs that provide financial assistance to them by offering the tools and advise that can help them improve their financial situation.
- Utilising Smart metering - if customers are worried about their bills, we can use flags to identify high and low users and provide advice to them accordingly.

4. WaterSure Scheme

We operate a scheme known as WaterSure, which provides alternative tariff options to households metered customers who meet certain criteria. The scheme ensures that their metered bill will be capped at a fixed annual charge.

To qualify for WaterSure, customers must receive one of the main means-tested benefits or tax credits and either:

- Receive child benefit for three or more children under the age of 19 living in the property.
- Someone in the household must use more water because of a medical condition.

How does it work?

- We will cap the customer’s bill in line with the average metered bill.
- If they use less, the customer will only pay for what they use.
- Customers will need to reapply each year.

5. Key principles

The following list of principles sets out how we identify and help customers who need extra support.

1. **Identify Vulnerable Customers**

We identify vulnerable customers through questioning and listening skills. This could include customers with disabilities, health issues, facing financial hardship or any other customers who need additional support.

2. **Training**

Continue to empower and train staff giving them the tools to help them identify signs of vulnerability and help support these customers and ensure customers that we provide a safe and reassuring presence, for example when visiting customers' homes to resolve any operational issues.

3. **Communication and Inclusivity**

Ensure our services and communications are accessible and inclusive to all customers, regardless of their vulnerability. Establish clear and open lines of communication with vulnerable customers through multiple channels such as phone, email, chat or social media considering factors such as language barriers, disabilities, financial constraints, or health conditions.

4. **Continuous Improvement**

Regularly assess and evaluate our support and customers interactions to identify areas for improvement. Implement feedback mechanisms such as surveys, focus groups or customer interviews to gather insights and refine our strategies.

5. **Develop policies and procedures.**

Develop and communicate clear policies that outline how our organisation will support vulnerable customers. This includes guidelines on data privacy, confidentiality, dispute resolution and accessibility standards to ensure a consistent and positive experience for all customers.

6. **Establish partnerships.**

Ensure we have the systems and processes in place to deliver accessible communication and build a customer-focused culture across the business we can continuously learn from. This includes are billing partner and third parties who work on our behalf as well as stakeholders who run and maintain the network.

6. What have we done so far?

The below outlines the measures we currently have in place to support customers who need extra help:

- Offering large print, braille, and audio bills to customers.
- We have added a communication tool to our website to help customers with additional language needs where English is not their first language. 'Translate' customers can translate web pages using Google Chrome Extension.
- Made improvements to our website to allow easy access for customers to contact us. We have included Text Relay UK which helps people with hearing or speech difficulties communicate with us over the phone, using a national relay service.
- We have created a 'Help and Support' page. This includes the below information on one place, reducing effort for our customers:
 - Water Sure application
 - Priority services information
 - Website accessibility e.g. translate
 - Independent advice, these include:
 - The MoneyPlus Group
 - The Step Change Debt Helpline
 - The Debt Advice Foundation
 - National Debtline.
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Age UK <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/>
 - Disabled Living Foundation <https://www.disabledliving.co.uk/>
 - Action on Hearing Loss <https://actionhearingloss.org.uk/>
- For customers with hearing and speech difficulties they can access 'Relay UK' to help them communicate with anyone over the phone.
- Use of doorstep passwords to deter bogus callers.
- The ability to nominate another person to receive their bills, correspondence or to speak to on their behalf.
- Receive prior warning of planned work which may interrupt their water supply.
- Receive priority treatment should their water supply be interrupted (we aim to arrange an alternative supply as quickly as possible and will often hand deliver bottled water to customers with mobility issues).
- Offering alternative and flexible payment arrangements when required.

We are working on improving our awareness and services in supporting vulnerable customers and outline our future improvement plans in the following section.

7. Future Plans

Action	Timeline
<p>Advance Metering</p> <p>Continue installing advanced meters on all sites and consider how we promote water efficiency help for customers who are trying to lower their water bills</p>	Ongoing
<p>Data sharing</p> <p>Continue to work with other companies to ensure Priority Services Register data is shared across different utilities.</p>	1-2 years
<p>Engaging stakeholders</p> <p>Work with charities and government organisations to gain more knowledge and experience in identifying and working with vulnerable customers as well as share best practice.</p>	1-2 years
<p>Technology</p> <p>Continue to utilise and amend our systems to accommodate vulnerable customer data/information to make it easier to identify.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Financial advice and support</p> <p>Work with financial charities and organisations such as Step Change and The Money advice service so we can offer the correct support for customers.</p>	Within 12 months
<p>Flexible repayment options</p> <p>Continue to offer alternatives and flexible payment arrangements for customers in financial hardship and continue to promote WaterSure.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Training and awareness</p> <p>Continue to empower and train staff giving them the tools to help them identify signs of vulnerability and help support these customers. Develop a customer focused tone of voice that is used consistently across customer communication.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Customer Satisfaction</p> <p>Undertake a customer survey targeting customers who need extra support/help to help improve our overall service and knowledge of the extra support customers require to meet their needs.</p>	6-12 months