



VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2025-2030



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Foreword

The provision of clean drinking water is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of society and economic prosperity, and access to clean water is a basic human right recognised by the United Nations. The advances in water safety planning and systems management underpinned by robust water quality regulation provide some of the best drinking water in the world.

Drinking water quality in England and Wales remains excellent, with public supplies consistently meeting the stringent regulatory standards for drinking water. Compliance with the standards is consistently at 99.97%, although the challenge remains to achieve 100% compliance with the regulatory standards.

Drinking water supplies in England and Wales are protected by safety planning which provides a robust multi-barrier approach. In this process, risks are identified from source to tap, and mitigations put in place to address the risks before there is any deterioration or impact on consumers. The quality of supplies is further verified through extensive random sampling. Occasionally things go wrong, and when this occurs, the Inspectorate investigates, assesses compliance breaches and events, and takes enforcement action to prevent recurrence. Summary details of the regulatory activity carried out by the Inspectorate during 2024 are presented in the annual Chief Inspector's Report, and further details of company improvement programmes are published on the DWI website.

Our water supply system is under pressure from a range of different threats, and these are made more urgent by climate change and population growth. In January, I made recommendations to ministers for updates to our drinking water standards. The recommendations have formed the basis of guidance to water companies, with the ultimate objective to update the regulations to meet modern standards of quality. This will enable consumers to remain confident in the quality of their drinking water, protected from contaminants.

However, other issues now need to be considered. Resilience of supplies, security, sufficiency in times of drought, and safe water reuse schemes, new treatment processes, and legacy issues such as lead pipes in domestic dwellings, are all important issues which need to be addressed. The Inspectorate has worked closely with Ofwat through the five yearly price review to ensure there is adequate investment in company assets and infrastructure, but much remains to be done to improve asset health and resilience.

Future priorities identified to strengthen our ability to regulate include:

Extend the regulatory framework to include third party contractors and those involved in the supply of water.

Provide additional powers to ensure sufficiency of supplies alongside water quality. Climate change and aging infrastructure are expected to worsen supply issues, making this an urgent problem.

Facilitate the use of harvested, recycled and greywater for domestic purposes, managing health risks and providing clear guidance.

Strengthen enforcement powers including granting the Inspectorate authority to issue notices, fines, and penalties. Introduce graduated enforcement for Security and Emergencies Direction and extend Inspector's powers of entry.

Make it compulsory for water companies to carry out security risk assessments applying them to all company assets and linking reporting duties with enforcement powers.

Address the long standing risk of lead exposure through supply pipes by tightening the standard and developing policies to accelerate the replacement of lead supply pipes.

Private water supplies are generally of poorer quality compared with public supplies. We support strengthening the legislation around these supplies including a requirement for registration with the local authority.

I look forward to working with renewed energy and purpose to protect and improve drinking water supplies today and for future generations.



Marcus Rink
Chief Inspector of Drinking Water



The Inspectorate's statutory duties

Establishment, powers, and primary legislation

The Drinking Water Inspectorate was established by Parliament in 1990 to provide independent assurance that the privatised water industry in England and Wales delivered safe, clean drinking water to consumers. Water supply matters are devolved to the Welsh Government by means of the Government of Wales Act 1998, and the Inspectorate is the regulator for both England and Wales.

The Chief Inspector of Drinking Water is appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Welsh ministers, and acts on their behalf. Certain powers are vested directly in the Chief Inspector which ensure clear independence in the Inspectorate's work. In addition to the Inspectorate's regulatory role, the Chief Inspector and Inspectors are the appointed technical advisers to the Secretary of State and Welsh ministers on all drinking water quality matters.

The primary legislation setting out the Inspectorate's functions and duties is contained in the Water Industry Act 1991¹. The enforcement provisions in section 68 of the Act have been formally delegated to the Chief Inspector by ministers. The provisions in section 70 of the Act concerning proceedings against water undertakers and others who supply water unfit for human consumption are vested directly in the Chief Inspector.

Drinking water quality regulator for public supplies

The Inspectorate is the regulator for the quality of public supplies of drinking water. The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 (England) and the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2018 (Wales) set out the regulatory requirements for the quality of public drinking water supplies.

Drinking water quality technical adviser for private supplies

Private water supplies are regulated by local authorities. The Inspectorate provides technical support and provides an annual report to ministers on the quality of private supplies.

Cyber security regulator for water industry

The Inspectorate is the regulator for the Network and Information Systems Regulations 2018, which covers cyber security within the water industry. These

¹ As amended.

regulations place any company supplying potable water to more than 200,000 people as an operator of essential services, with associated requirements to manage risks to their network and information systems, and to prevent and minimise the impact of incidents to those systems.

Security and emergencies regulator for water supply and sewerage

The Inspectorate is the regulator for the Security and Emergency Measures (Water and Sewerage Undertakers and Water Supply Licensees) Direction 2022 (as amended). Under section 208 of the Water Industry Act 1991, undertakers and licensees are required to maintain a water supply and/or sewerage system in the interests of national security or to mitigate the effects of any civil emergency which may occur. The Inspectorate's role is to review companies' annual self-assessments and along with auditing and event assessments, take any necessary compliance and enforcement actions in line with the SEMD enforcement policy, for water and wastewater.



The Inspectorate's main non-statutory activities

Our work is wide-ranging, covering all aspects of the quality of public water supplies. The collective technical expertise of our staff covers all aspects of the science, engineering, and management of drinking water supplies. Closely aligned with our statutory duties, the Inspectorate has responsibility for many other functions, including:

- Provision of advice and guidance to water suppliers² on all aspects of drinking water supply.
- Dealing with queries relating to drinking water quality from consumers, organisations, and businesses.
- Provision of technical advice to ministers and officials on drinking water supply issues, and on Parliamentary and other queries arising.
- Working collaboratively with the other regulators in the water industry.
- Provision of advice to ministers on private water supplies (those not supplied by a water company) and related issues.
- Provision of advice and support to local authorities on all aspects of drinking water quality, including private water supplies.
- Management of Defra's Water Quality and Health research programme.

It is the responsibility of policy officials to advise their ministers on policy matters arising in connection with drinking water supply.



² Water suppliers include water and sewerage companies, water supply only companies, inset appointees and other water supply licensees as defined in the WIA (holders of water supply licence (wholesale and supplementary) authorisations and retail-only licensees).

The Inspectorate's vision and strategic objectives

OUR VISION: Safe and secure drinking water in England and Wales

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

1: To protect public health through a continuous supply of wholesome drinking water

Public health relies on a continuous supply of wholesome drinking water. We ensure public supplies are sufficient, secure, and resilient. We take enforcement action to improve system resilience and ensure the security of supplies into the future.

We promote policies which reduce exposure to lead from drinking water, working with Ministers to update conveyancing legislation, and highlighting landlord obligations to remove lead from the supply system, and ensuring water companies prioritise schools and nurseries.

We assess company security plans and their resilience to cyber-attacks. These are essential elements which ensure consumers enjoy a continuous water supply with no interruptions.

2: To protect and improve drinking water quality in England and Wales and thereby maintain consumer confidence in drinking water

We regulate water companies to ensure supplies remain of exceptionally high quality. We adopt the water safety planning approach, advocated by the World Health Organization, to ensure that risks, from source to tap, are identified and put right before there is any impact on consumers. We promote catchment management and source protection as the best way of protecting supplies, with adequate treatment, disinfection, and verification monitoring to demonstrate the quality. We work with local authorities to improve the quality of private water supplies.

We conduct independent assessments of water company performance and publish our findings in the annual Chief Inspector's Report. Consumers have access to their

water company's performance and can have confidence in their drinking water supply.

We advise government on updates to drinking water standards to protect consumers from new contaminants and keep legislation up to date.

3: To ensure effective regulation of drinking water supplies.

Our enforcement activity focusses on the greatest risk to water company consumers and aims to prevent problems from developing, and to put in place long term sustainable solutions. The three enforcement policies for drinking water quality, security and emergency planning of supplies, and cyber security, are published on our website, and our enforcement processes are transparent. We provide technical guidance alongside each set of regulations to explain and clarify expectations for the water companies, in line with the principles of better regulation and the regulators' code. Our staff have technical and investigative skills and knowledge of the water industry and are provided with resources to enable them to be effective in delivering these principles.

Non-licenced third-party entities in the water supply chain are beyond the regulatory reach of the Inspectorate, with risks to consumers. The use of third-party contractors, designers, builders/installers and operators to deliver everything from water treatment plants (under Ofwat's Direct Procurement for Customers (DPC)) to connections at domestic houses was not considered when the Water Industry Act 1991 was drafted. This creates a group of operators who are currently not regulated. There are no powers to inspect, investigate, enforce, or prosecute against anyone who is not a water undertaker or licensee. This should be rectified to protect the quality and security of all drinking water supplies. The use of third parties is set to increase under competitive market initiatives. Some of the issues with DPCs can be addressed in the interim via contracts, however, primary legislation change is the preferred permanent option.

4: To promote long term planning for drinking water supplies

Access to safe drinking water is a [United Nations basic human right](#), and the delivery of safe and sufficient drinking water relies on effective long-term planning. We will

provide guidance for water companies on long-term planning requirements for drinking water. We will ensure supplies are wholesome, sustainable and resilient through statutory improvement programmes, and we will scrutinise water company investment plans to ensure that all operations, from source to tap, are safe and secure in delivering our drinking water for current and future generations.

Through the Regulator's Association for the Progression of Infrastructure Development, we ensure that new supplies are safe and acceptable to consumers.

We support efficient use of resources; we recommend less reliance on the wholesome water supply by industrial users where possible, and support the safe use of recycled water treated to a wholesome drinking water standard and supported by a water safety plan.

During 2025, we will develop water quality standards appropriate for toilet flushing and garden use to facilitate the use of recycled/grey/rainwater for domestic and industrial use to address resource constraints. We will consult with an expert advisory group to ensure standards are safe and practical.

Water companies are sometimes unable to meet demand for water, meaning consumers are left without a mains supply. This could be due to drought, freeze or rapid thaw events and/or network infrastructure not being resilient, resulting in, for example, burst pipes. Unlike issues with quality of water, existing secondary legislation does not allow the Inspectorate to prosecute water companies nor seek legal improvement commitments for their failings. Whilst there is a duty in primary legislation on the Inspectorate to ensure that water is sufficient, there are no powers to make legislation in this area, hence why it is absent from our secondary legislation. This is an issue and likely to become an ever more significant one with climate change impacts such as more extreme weather events and aging infrastructure. It should be addressed to ensure we have the necessary legislation to hold water companies (and possibly relevant persons in respect of private water supplies but to be discussed), to account to deliver a wholesome AND sufficient supply. The Inspectorate should be the delegated regulatory authority for sufficiency and have powers to inspect assets and determine if water supplies are sufficiently resilient from source to consumer tap. This would enable the Inspectorate to take enforcement action where assets are deemed to be a risk to the supply of water and have direct powers to prosecute for 'water insufficiency'. The Inspectorate should have a duty with regards to companies' water resilience and sufficiency plans, that the Inspectorate oversees.

5: To provide advice on national policy matters relating to drinking water quality, security and emergency planning, and supply.

We base our work on sound science and evidence, and we carry out research on emerging threats to drinking water to understand changing risks, and adapt our regulatory approach.

We publish data from water companies and local authorities. We manage data securely and develop systems which allow us to use that data to achieve all our other strategic objectives, regulating efficiently, fairly and effectively.

The Inspectorate will provide technical advice on drinking water quality, sufficiency and security and emergency planning matters, including in emergencies, for the development of national policy, and to support all our stakeholders including the water industry, policy and government, regulators, and the public, providing accurate and accessible information in a timely manner. We will promote access to safe drinking water for all communities. We will work with national and international partners and experts to provide the best advice for the benefit of consumers.

We will provide a technical advisory service for local authorities to help them regulate private water supplies, and we will make reports on the quality of private water supplies to the government.



Our objectives in more detail

1. Regulation and legislation

Objective: To ensure water suppliers comply with drinking water quality legislation.

We will deliver proportionate and appropriate regulation, commensurate with current legislation, to ensure that drinking water supplies remain wholesome and sufficient now and for future generations. In doing so, we will protect public health and seek to maintain public confidence in drinking water.

Our approach: We will advise policy makers to ensure that legislation is fit for purpose, deliverable, and relevant for the water industry and for private water suppliers.

2. Stakeholder engagement

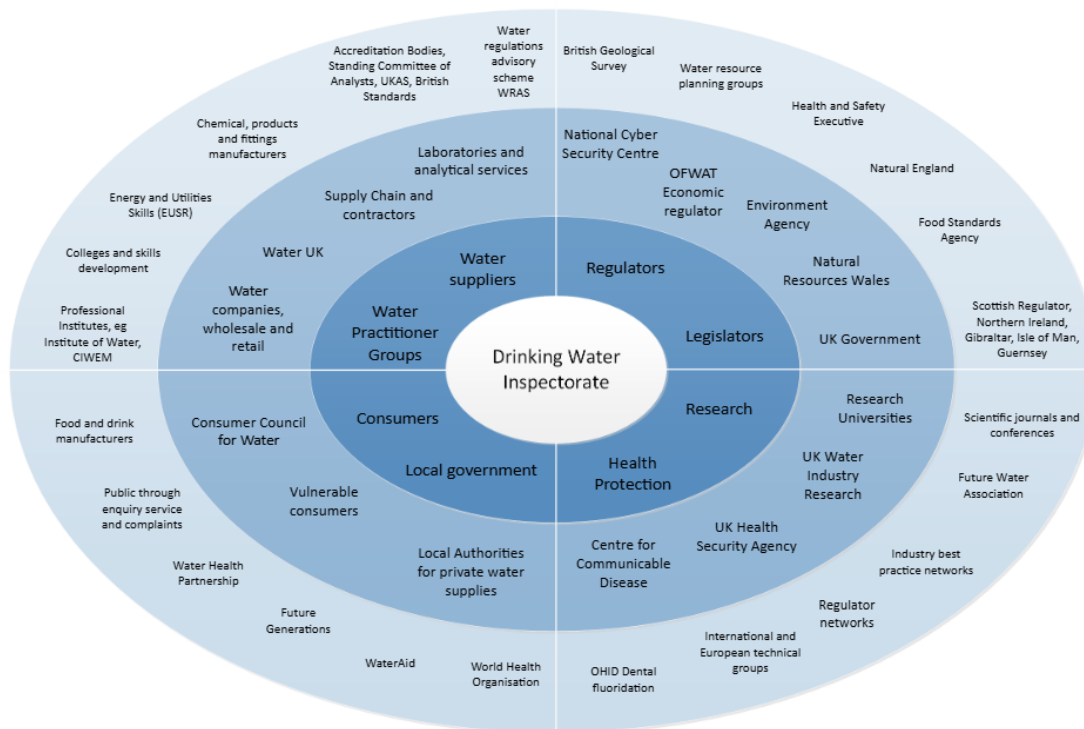
Objective: To engage with all stakeholders, including water suppliers, supply chains, government, regulators, and consumers, in the pursuit of maintaining and improving wholesome and sufficient drinking water.

Our approach: On policy, we will engage at all levels on strategic objectives for future decision making. We will work collaboratively with other regulators and engage with their strategies to ensure that drinking water quality and sufficiency is always considered within the scope of any strategic decision.

We will engage with water suppliers at all levels, including board and working levels, to ensure the resilient delivery of wholesome and sufficient drinking water. We will promote the significant role of the supply chains for water companies when considering their operation to maintain the supply of wholesome water.

We will put consumers at the centre of our decision-making.

Key:
Primary Stakeholder groups
Stakeholders we work with to deliver our goals
Stakeholders we engage with regularly



3. Assurance

Objective: To operate to the standards expected by the [Regulators' Code](#) to ensure we deliver open, transparent, proportionate, and risk-based regulation. We will be fair and independent.

Our approach: Publication: We will publish our enforcement policy, and associated appeal mechanisms, a report on our actions, and our annual Business Performance report, in a straightforward manner. Our strategies and reports will be shared on our website.

Behaviour: We will respond to non-compliance in a fair and equitable manner but take enforcement action if required. We will ensure even-handed application of regulatory processes on companies and be transparent in all the performance measures we apply.

We will always provide a timely explanation of our decisions to those we regulate, to enable them to make better decisions and allow them to work towards full compliance.

We will recognise efforts made by companies towards achieving compliance in a fair and equitable manner.

We will avoid unnecessary regulatory burden to those we regulate and will hold ourselves to account through our own policies and procedures.

We will seek feedback from those we regulate in order to foster productive working relationships.

We will deliver regulation of public water supplies through appropriately trained and competent staff, using our enforcement powers, as appropriate, to protect consumers. We will oversee the activities of water suppliers, carrying out our audit investigations and assessment functions in an efficient and transparent manner, in the interests of consumers.

4. Organisation

Objective: To ensure that the structure of the organisation is designed to deliver our strategic objectives, and that our staff are competent, consistent, efficient and effective.

Our approach: We will maintain our highly-skilled workforce, consisting of a professional, multi-disciplinary group of experts.

5. Information and technology

Objective: To use digital technology to collect and report information in an accessible and reliable way for all stakeholders.

Our approach: Ensuring that our website is fit for purpose, accurate and relevant.

To develop IT which allows easy interface for the collection of information from stakeholders (who are under an obligation to provide it), in a way that is robust and reliable.

To develop interfaces which allow dissemination of relevant material where possible to stakeholders, including water companies, local authorities and consumers.

6. Communications

Objective: To use effective communication tools to obtain all relevant information in order to make sound decisions in the public interest; and to disseminate relevant information to stakeholders, including ministers, consumers, water companies and regulators.

Our approach: To engage with relevant groups, where drinking water quality is concerned, on an international, national and local level.

We will employ tested methodologies to derive intelligence on drinking water quality from whatever source, including research, political, international, media, and interested groups.

We will provide timely and technical advice and guidance to water suppliers, governments, local authorities, health officers and other regulators, at both national and international levels; we will explore the potential contribution of social media to this objective.

To ensure that consumers have sufficient information to have confidence in the quality of their drinking water.

7. Public water supplies

Objective: To ensure an appropriate regulatory regime that keeps pace with developments that may affect drinking water. To ensure a high level of compliance with that regime by water suppliers, so that consumers have confidence in their drinking water supplies.

Our approach: To ensure legislation is current and relevant; to provide tools to collate and report information; and to act on behalf of the Secretary of State to ensure that we deliver their responsibilities.

We will continue with the enactment of the WIA to protect public health on behalf of consumers.

To provide technical advice and information to Defra and the Welsh Government to meet requirements of the legislation.

To ensure the tools and resources are available to collate and maintain the national record on compliance with the public water supply regulations, and to report the current status to ministers.

To develop and maintain evidence-based measures that bring about positive change and improvement within the industry.

8. Network and Information Systems

The Security of Network and Information Systems (NIS) Directive provides legal measures to protect essential services and infrastructure, by improving the security of network and information systems. The Directive applies to those sectors which are vital for the economy and society, and provide services such as the supply of electricity, water, healthcare and transport.

The NIS Directive was adopted by the European Parliament on 6 July 2016, and EU Member States had until 9 May 2018 to transpose the Directive into domestic legislation. The UK implemented the requirements of the NIS Directive through the NIS Regulations 2018, which came into force on 10 May 2018.

Drinking water supply and distribution was designated an essential service within Schedule 1 of the Regulations, with the threshold for operators of essential services within the sector, identified in Schedule 2, as the supplier of potable water to 200,000 or more people.

The Inspectorate is the delegated authority responsible for checking that water companies have taken the appropriate action to maintain network security in the supply of drinking water quality, and to safeguard public health.

The NIS regulations provide legal measures to protect essential services and infrastructure by improving the security of network and information systems. Operational responsibilities of the competent authority function, under the Regulations for the water sector, have been conferred on the Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate will: prepare and publish guidance documents to assist operators of essential services; receive and assess incident notifications and undertake incident assessments, conduct inspections (audits) and enforcement (including issuing notices and penalties), where necessary.

Objective: To ensure the industry is resilient to cyberattacks, by identifying risks and promoting their mitigation; ensuring threats are contained and that lessons are learned.

Our approach: We will have sufficient staff who are appropriately trained.

We will plan to drive company investment, while working with other regulators within the regulatory framework. This will be achieved by charging fees which are equitable, proportionate, and justifiable to the objective.

9. Securities and Emergencies Direction

The Inspectorate will regulate national security in the water and wastewater sector as well as ensuring companies mitigate the effects of a civil emergency (S208 of the Water Industry Act).

10. Private water supplies

Objective: To promote effective regulation of private water supplies by local authorities, so that consumers are afforded the same level of protection as for public supplies.

Our approach: To ensure legislation is current and relevant. To help provide tools to collate and report information.

To ensure that we deliver our responsibilities under the Water Industry Act, including hearing representations on notices served.

To provide technical advice and information to inform local authorities, helping them to meet the requirements of the legislation.

To ensure the tools and resources are available to collate and maintain the national record on the location and water quality of private water supplies; and to report the current status to ministers.

To provide information and guidance to stakeholders involved in private water supplies, including government departments responsible for cross-cutting areas such as housing, planning, and conveyancing, where policies and standards intersect with the management and regulation of private water supplies.

11. Long term considerations and challenges

Objective: To engage with government and stakeholders on policy and strategy to tackle future challenges facing drinking water supplies and water resources.

Our approach: To provide evidence-based advice to ministers on strategic issues facing the water sector, and regulation. These will include maintaining and updating regulatory standards to protect consumers, ensuring sufficiency and resilience of

supplies, advising on security matters and ensuring that where practiced there are sufficient safeguards to ensure the safe reuse and recycling of water.

We will engage with technical experts including the UK Health Security Agency, to ensure the best advice is available, and we will carry out a research programme to improve understanding and close knowledge gaps.

We recognise changes in demographics, future generational needs and expectations, and will support proposals for any new infrastructure needed to maintain a sufficient supply of wholesome water.

We recognise that the provision of water has a social purpose, and the value of water should be reflected in wider society.

