

January 2026 Webinars: Questions and Answers

We held two webinars in January 2026 to let partner organisations across the region know that we had begun work on the first statutory cycle of the DWMP. We offered people who wanted to participate a choice of dates and times but used the same presentation at both webinars to ensure the same information was provided at each session. The Q&As from the webinars have been combined into a single set.

1. Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and use of Sustainable Drainage Systems

Q: How will Southern Water ensure that the DWMP isn't constrained by the heavy concrete solutions of the past and rebalance towards outcome and nature-based solutions?

A: We are really passionate about ensuring catchment and nature-based solutions are used rather than continuing to build ever-larger, engineering-based solutions, as we can see these don't work anymore. The Water Special Measures Act also places a requirement on us to consider Nature-Based Solutions.

Q: How will Southern Water ensure Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) are utilised because, despite the learning from mainstreaming NBS, SUDS are often scoped out due to risk, which isn't correct.

A: We know from the work we've been undertaking on storm overflows that we will not be able to solve storm overflow risks by building concrete storage tanks as we've done before. Using this learning alongside the Defra principles means we need to rethink urban drainage so that:

- rainwater is returned to the environment as close to where it falls as possible
- wherever possible, rainwater is removed from our systems so it's not filling our sewerage pipes causing overflows to spill.

There are real opportunities to think differently and to drive forward the use of catchment and nature-based solutions. For example, we've already completed a body of work through our Cleaner Rivers and Seas Pathfinder programme by developing partnerships to disconnect rainwater from combined sewage systems using catchment and NBS, whether using swales or wetlands or green roofs, to slow the flow of rainwater, or separate it and return it to the environment before it gets contaminated with sewage.

We could then use the evidence to influence the regulatory position and our regulators on the use of NBS and SUDS. It's something we were passionate about when we submitted

our first DWMP in 2023 and we'll have even better evidence for DWMP28 of the long-term benefits of these solutions for our region and for affordability for our customers.

2. Future growth

Q: How will you take into account future increases in housing that might not yet be in plans, as well as the broader long term housing delivery targets set by government? Can you make sure that new infrastructure is built with spare capacity that is expandable and not limited to the needs for the five-year AMP.

A: It's really important to understand future growth. However, it is really difficult to understand where that future growth may need to connect into our wastewater systems and which wastewater system it may connect into, particularly in larger urban areas served by more than one wastewater treatment works. There has to be some flexibility. This is where we need to work with regulators to make sure that we can put infrastructure in place that has spare capacity for future growth that is yet uncertain rather than keep going back to the same site every five years to expand the capacity.

We need to have further discussions around future development to see how we can make sure that is accommodated within the DWMP and that the regulatory processes will facilitate funding for the capacity improvements required. We like to have headroom at our treatment works so it's always useful for us to over-design it to take future capacity into account, but there are challenges around the funding for additional capacity. We will have to address that.

3. Properties not connected into mains sewerage

Q: There are a large number of properties not currently connected to mains drainage within drinking water catchments but rely on private septic tanks or package treatment plants. How will these be considered in the DWMP?

A: There is a 'First Time Sewerage' programme where customers can put in a request for a sewage mains drainage system. We looked at the risks of groundwater pollution from our wastewater systems in cycle one of our DWMP. I'm not sure that the process worked that well to tackle some of the environmental issues.

What we'd like to do now is work with the EA and use the DWMP to identify where there is a need for first time sewerage because currently, villages and properties can discharge to the ground or into septic tanks which then discharge into ground or local rivers. We know there's an issue with private wastewater treatment systems and the impact these can have on the environment.

We're really keen to understand the risks and where we need to promote a first-time sewage scheme so that those properties can be connected up to mains drainage. That's particularly important because we're now seeing a lot more developments in rural villages



that, if not dealt with through proper drainage and wastewater treatment, could have an increasing impact on the environment.

We are working with the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) to try and identify hotspots where there are large numbers of properties that aren't connected to our systems, which implies they're on a separate tank or a package plant. The interesting point is that if they're at a very low flow rates, they're often not even within the consented regime. So, the only way we can tell that they're there is through a property analysis. We've identified grid squares where we think an investigation is merited to understand the environmental risks. This might give us a direction for future investigations.

4. Protected Landscapes

Q: Where do you include protected landscapes? Southern Water will be a partner in the partnership management plan for each of these. Further to that, the South Downs National Park is also the local planning authority, so it has a dual role in your engagement. SDNPA has pretty good communications at senior level within Southern Water and ensuring we are able to capture that and filter down to the relevant officers would be welcome.

A: I'm not sure I can answer where we include protected landscapes at the moment. I'd welcome further discussion where we should and could be including protected landscapes within the DWMP so that we can understand where there might be an impact with any infrastructure investment that we put forward in the future.

I think we certainly endorse the need for strong relationships with the SDNPA as well as other key stakeholders across the region because it is a significant area across our region.

Q: How will Southern Water work with local nature recovery strategies (LNRS) and ensure that your work on the DWMP aligns with the LNRS measures.

A: We need to engage with partner organisations on Local Nature Recovery Strategies as there a number across our region. We will need to do some overlay with where the LNRSs are and the impacts that we're likely to have on those through our DWMP activities. We must make sure the DWMP is taking the LNRS into account and that the actions we plan in the DWMP will help and support the delivery of those strategies.

5. Water Efficiency

Q: The recent consultation on water efficiency standards through building regulations considered the potential for rainwater, grey water and black water recycling through new developments. What infrastructure changes will be required to support this in the future?

A: We know that we must value all the water that we have, because this is already a water stressed region. We are looking at the potential for wastewater recycling and reuse from our treatment works as part of the Havant Thicket reservoir development. Whilst the water



in the reservoir will be primarily spring fed, it's also going to be fed from recycled water from our Budds Farm wastewater treatment works. We are using learning from other countries around the world that recycle wastewater and put it back into water supply. We're not advocating direct reuse at this point, but we need to use smarter thinking about using the valuable water resource that we have and rethinking rainwater harvesting for reuse locally. There are significant challenges, particularly from a public safety point of view, because of the strict standards that are applied around drinking water.

There can be challenges when you start having more than one supply into a house through utilising rain and/or grey water. People must have safe drinking water, and we wouldn't be able to make sure they're using the right water for the right purposes. But rethinking the reuse of water in the urban environment, particularly how we design our houses for the future, will be really valuable. It could be used to create a lot more green roofs, rainwater harvesting and reuse at the domestic, retail and commercial levels. Let's see how we can work together to try and make that happen in the future.

6. Flooding

Q: As a Lead Local Flood Authority, Hampshire County Council is trying to get a better understanding of the flooding issues within our identified priority areas. The previous DWMP identified areas of hydraulic overloading. Is this something that will be identified in this DWMP. Can the data be shared?

A: To answer the question, yes, we're going to be looking at hydraulic overloading. Internal and external flooding are two of the Performance Indicators for the DWMP. There's also a third one about surface water flooding where there's a shared responsibility so that's something that we're starting to have a look at in terms of how we will assess that performance. Initially, the national guidance is saying to look at the surface water flood map from the EA, and the river and coastal flood map, to understand where that overlaps with our wastewater systems, looking at where we have sewer flooding issues and that will help identify the opportunities for closer working with the flood risk management authorities. So, hopefully, we can continue to have some really productive discussions as we develop the DWMP.

We're very aware of the work that Hampshire County Council has done on flooding in various catchments across the county, and there's some information that the Council has requested from us in terms of hydraulic overloading. This is where the portal will be really helpful to ensure that we can share data much more efficiently than we currently are able to.

7. Devolution / Levelling Up and Regeneration



Q: How will Southern Water factor in devolution and the impacts this could have on planning?

A: We're watching this with interest to see how it pans out. It is another area where we need to work with the local councils because they're much closer than us to local government devolution arrangements. But it is clear that we need to work with the local government organisations now and into the future, whatever that looks like in the future. We are working in a changing environment, so our plan must be adaptive to those changes. Having an annual review of the DWMP means we can start considering and factoring in changes that are happening around us as well as within our own business.

Q: How does the DWMP process take account of upcoming devolution, the Local Government Reorganisation and the shift in organisations' responsibilities which will affect some areas of Southern Water's responsibilities.

A: It's difficult to answer this at the moment. We're watching the local government devolution closely to see how that shapes up across our patch. It is likely to be a mixed picture in terms of how it will land. We're seeing change across the board, even in the regulatory regime, so we will adapt our plan and the way we develop it, to fit into any changes. The key thing is to maintain the links and to work with the people that are responsible for drainage, flooding and the environment, even if they are changing organisations or going through that process, so we just need to be mindful of their availability during the DWMP planning process.

Q: The 2024 Defra guidance for the DWMP is disappointing. It fails to recognise the new duties imposed on water companies by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) to further the purpose of all landscapes, including national parks. This is highly relevant to this DWMP given that Southern Water assets are within and impact the New Forest National Park. It would be great to find a way this could be addressed in this process going forward. Do you have any plans already in this respect?

A: That's a really important point. In the first cycle of the DWMP, we had a lot of engagement with the South Downs National Park and the New Forest National Park Authorities, and we hope to build on and further that engagement to address the specific requirement within the LURA as we progress the second cycle of the DWMP.

The other thing that is significant from the LURA is the nutrient neutrality requirements. There are four nutrient neutrality sensitive catchments designated across our region, and we're investing heavily to make sure the treatment works that serve more than 2000 customers are at the best technically achievable limits for nutrient reduction by 2030. That is a significant investment on the back of that piece of legislation.

8. Forever chemicals

Q: Forever chemicals (PFAS) are a hot topic for customers and stakeholders. What can you do about this, specifically around preventing PFAS from the wastewater network getting into water recycling projects.

A: We are working with the national chemical investigation programme, other water companies and the EA to investigate the issues around the forever chemicals, PFAS and PFO. We need to understand the developments we can put in place to try and tackle some of the challenges of them getting into our environment, particularly if they're coming through a wastewater treatment works.

We also have an internal SW PFOS task force because the issue affects both our wastewater and water supplies. We need to work together in a holistic way to reduce the amount getting into the water recycling plants. The RO (Reverse Osmosis) membranes used at water treatment plants are really effective at removing PFAS, pharmaceuticals and other things, but the more that can be achieved at the wastewater treatment works and in the catchment upstream, that will further improve the quality of water that is in customers taps and hopefully, the acceptability of water recycling as a future water source.

9. DWMP Portal

Q: How do we request access to the GIS portal?

A: We're currently working with our digital teams to develop our GIS portal. As soon as it is up and running, we'll come and talk to you about the information and data it will contain, how we're going to use it as part of the DWMP and how you can get access to it. You'll have to bear with us on this because there's still quite a bit of work to do and we want to get it right. We're working very closely with our digital team to make sure it's set up in the right way.

10. Links with other Southern Water Plans

Q: How will the DWMP be linked with the other Southern Water plans, such as the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan (PIRP), which has a significant overlap?

A: Every year we look at our performance in terms of pollution incidents, what's caused them, what's driving them, and what actions need to be taken. Producing and reporting on the PIRP is now a statutory requirement. It was a part of the Water Special Measures Act, and it relates to an in-AMP period in the operational environment.

However, action to reduce pollution incidents will not wait for the DWMP to be produced. If there's actions that need to be taken, then our operational teams will take that forward. But if they're seeing trends and a need for strategic investment across our estate and infrastructure to improve performance, then that will feed into the DWMP and we will plug

that into the price review process to secure the funding for operational teams to deliver more reductions in pollution incidents in the following AMP.

The link between the two plans is really, really important but is still being developed. We're working internally to make sure that we can align the two planning processes and make it as efficient as possible.