Vulnerable Customers

Vulnerability Strategy 2026

Our purpose

To make sure business customers who need extra help can access a fair, clear and inclusive service — whether their circumstances are temporary, recurring or long term.

Re- Published: July 2026

Next scheduled review: July 2027, or earlier if regulations, customer needs or our services change.

Our commitment

At SES Business Water, we recognise that vulnerability is not always visible and does not look the same for every customer. It may relate to the circumstances of a key person within a business, or to the circumstances of the business or organisation itself.

We will listen without judgement, focus on the support that is needed and make reasonable, practical adjustments to help customers access and manage their water and wastewater services.

Make it easy to ask for help

Customers can tell us what support they need through any of our normal contact channels.

Communicate clearly

We will use plain language and adapt our approach where a different format, channel or pace would help.

Provide tailored support

We will consider the individual circumstances rather than applying a one-size-fits-all response.

Act with care

Known support needs will be considered when we manage billing, payments, debt, complaints and account changes.

Protect personal information

We will only record information that is relevant to the support we provide and handle it securely.

Keep improving

We will train our teams, review outcomes and update this strategy on an ongoing basis.

Need additional support with your account?

Call: 0203 750 9300, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Email: query@sesbusinesswater.co.uk

Online: use the contact form on our website

Please tell us: the support or adjustment that would help — you do not need to use the word “vulnerable”.

1 Purpose and regulatory basis

This strategy explains how SES Business Water identifies and supports non-household customers who may need additional help to access an inclusive service. It is designed for customers, colleagues and partners and is published on our website.

For customers in England and Wales, it supports our obligations under Ofwat’s Customer Protection Code of Practice (CPCoP), including the requirements to make communications accessible where reasonably possible, provide accessible and effective customer service, take action to meet the needs of vulnerable customers, review our approach on an ongoing basis and publish our strategy online.

We also take account of applicable equality and data protection law, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people and the need to handle personal information lawfully, fairly and securely.

Key references: Ofwat Customer Protection Code of Practice v2.3; Equality Act 2010; UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

2 What we mean by vulnerability

A customer may need additional support because of the personal circumstances of a key individual associated with the customer, or because of the circumstances of the business or organisation. These circumstances may be short term or long term. Without an inclusive service, they could affect the performance of the business or cause harm to the health, wellbeing or finances of key individuals.

Vulnerability is about the situation and the barrier a customer faces — not a label. A customer may move into or out of vulnerable circumstances over time.

Examples of circumstances that may create a support need

- A disability, physical or mental health condition, or communication need affecting a key individual.
- Bereavement, serious illness, caring responsibilities or another significant life event.
- Difficulty reading, understanding or responding to information, including language, literacy or digital barriers.
- Financial difficulty, a sudden loss of income or unexpected high bill.
- A sole trader, small business, charity or organisation with limited capacity to manage a complex account issue.
- A critical operational dependency on water, for example for health, care, food production, animals or essential public services.
- A major incident, site disruption or other business circumstances that temporarily affects the customer's ability to engage with us.

These examples are not exhaustive. We will consider any circumstance that creates a genuine barrier to accessing or managing our service.

3 How we identify support needs

We use a combination of customer disclosure, staff awareness, and information available through normal account contact. We will not make assumptions about a customer, but we may ask whether additional support would help when we notice signs of difficulty or distress.

Customers tell us

A customer can explain the support they need by phone, email, letter, or online. They can also tell us their preferred way to communicate.

Our teams recognise a potential need

Customer-facing colleagues are trained to notice signs that a customer may be struggling to understand, respond, pay, or access the service.

An authorised person contacts us

A customer can nominate a trusted employee, family member, adviser or representative, subject to appropriate authority and account security checks.

What we may ask
We will usually ask only what support is needed, how long it may be needed, and how the customer would prefer us to communicate.
We will not normally need detailed medical evidence or a diagnosis. In some circumstances, we may need further information to provide a specific adjustment or meet legal and security requirements.

We review existing support

Support needs can change. We will confirm and update relevant information when appropriate, rather than assuming it remains correct.

4 Support we can provide

Support will be tailored to the circumstances and agreed where possible with the customer. The options below are examples and are not an exhaustive list.

Where support may be needed	How we can help
Communication and accessibility	• Use a preferred contact channel or agree a suitable time to call. • Explain information in plain language and break complex issues into clear steps. • Provide extra time to consider information or respond where reasonable. • Explore alternative formats, such as large print or an accessible electronic copy, were reasonably practicable. • Provide a non-digital route where an online process creates a barrier.
Bills, meters and account information	• Explain how a bill has been calculated and what information we need to investigate a query. • Help a customer understand meter readings, estimated consumption, charges or account changes. • Provide copies of key information in writing when requested, particularly for micro-business customers where the CPCoP requires this.
Payment difficulty	• Discuss the account early and consider a suitable payment arrangement where one is available. • Take known support needs into account when agreeing how and when we make contact about debt. • Offer a reasonable repayment plan to a micro-business for a qualifying back-bill, in line with the CPCoP. • Signpost to free, independent business or debt advice where this may help.
Trusted representatives	• Record an authorised contact who can help manage the account, within the authority the customer has given. • Communicate with the representative while continuing to protect the customer's information and account security.
Critical water dependency and emergencies	• Record relevant operational needs and, where appropriate, liaise with the water or wastewater wholesaler. • Help the customer identify the correct wholesaler and emergency contact details. • Make clear that the wholesaler is responsible for the physical network and emergency supply arrangements; support cannot guarantee an uninterrupted supply.
Complaints and complex issues	• Use an appropriate communication approach and provide clear next steps and timescales. • Allow an authorised representative to support the customer through the complaint. • Consider reasonable adjustments throughout investigation and resolution.

Customers remain responsible for charges properly due under their contract or applicable terms. Additional support does not remove those obligations, but it may change how we communicate, the time allowed, or the practical route used to resolve an issue.

5 How we record and protect support information

To provide consistent support, we may add a confidential note or support flag to the account. We will focus on the adjustment or practical need rather than recording unnecessary detail about a person's circumstances.

- Explain why the information is needed and how it will be used.
- Record only information that is relevant and proportionate to providing support.
- Restrict access to colleagues and service partners who need the information to do their role.
- Keep the information secure and review it so that it remains accurate and necessary.
- Update or remove the information when the customer tells us the circumstances have changed, subject to legal retention requirements.
- Share information with an authorised representative, wholesaler or other relevant party only where necessary and lawful.

More information about how we use personal data is available in our Privacy Policy.

6 How we embed the strategy

Training and guidance

Customer-facing colleagues receive practical training on recognising potential vulnerability, asking appropriate questions, agreeing adjustments, recording support and escalating concerns.

Consistent account handling

Relevant support needs are visible to authorised colleagues so customers do not have to repeat sensitive information unnecessarily.

Third-party oversight

Where a partner supports our customer service, billing or debt activity, we expect it to follow this strategy and our operational requirements.

Quality assurance

We review customer contacts and outcomes to check that support is being applied appropriately and that customers are treated fairly.

Clear ownership

Senior management is responsible for oversight, while operational leaders are responsible for implementation, coaching and improvement.

7 Monitoring, feedback and review

We review this strategy on an ongoing basis to make sure it remains effective. Our monitoring may include:

- completion and effectiveness of colleague training;
- the number and type of support requests and adjustments, using aggregated information where possible;
- whether agreed support actions are completed and account records remain current;
- complaints, quality findings and customer feedback relating to vulnerability or accessibility;

- outcomes from billing, payment and debt cases where support needs are known; and
- changes to regulation, guidance, technology and good practice.

We will formally review and republish the strategy at least once a year, and sooner where a regulatory change, significant incident or evidence from customers shows that an update is needed.

8 Contact us and tell us what would help

You do not need to provide a diagnosis or use specific language. Tell us the barrier you are facing and the adjustment or support that would make it easier to manage your account.

Telephone	0203 750 9300 — Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
Email	query@sesbusinesswater.co.uk
Write to us	SES Business Water, 66–74 London Road, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 1LJ
Online	Contact form at sesbusinesswater.co.uk/contact

Water or wastewater emergency

For an unplanned loss of supply, water quality issue, sewer flooding or another network emergency, contact your water or wastewater wholesaler directly. Your wholesaler may be different for water and wastewater.

The wholesaler's details are shown on your bill and on the SES Business Water emergency contacts webpage.

Useful links: Emergency contacts | Complaints Policy | Consumer Council for Water

This strategy is a public summary of our approach. It should be read alongside the terms and conditions applying to the customer's account, our Privacy Policy and our Complaints Policy.