

24 November 2021

Mr Harry Catherall  
Chief Executive  
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Level 3, Civic Centre  
West Street  
Oldham  
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Dear Mr Catherall

Thank you for your letter which I received on 10 November 2021.

Please let me reassure you that United Utilities takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously and we agree that further investment in sewerage infrastructure is required to modernise the system and improve river water quality.

I would like to provide you with some context to the issue of sewer overflows. During storm conditions, when sewers and treatment plants are operating at full capacity, we are permitted to spill excess storm water from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) to help prevent the flooding of streets, homes and businesses. Over the past twenty years, United Utilities has invested £1.2bn improving CSOs to reduce the amount and impact of spills.

Sewer networks have been designed this way for decades however, in recent times, more people have told us that they do not like the idea of untreated sewage going into our rivers and seas, no matter how diluted. We agree. However, it will take many years to change how excess rainfall is managed, especially in our region. We are fully committed to taking what steps we can to reduce harm, investing in our own assets and working in partnership with others.

In our business plan, between 2020 and 2025 we will be investing in improvements to a number of combined sewer overflows across the region and we will investigate 195 high-spilling overflows to inform spill reduction schemes for future investment. In addition, through the sector's Green Recovery programme, we have committed to investigate 300 more high-spilling overflows. These detailed assessments will help us understand the environmental impact of these overflows and identify the costs and benefits of proposed solutions to inform future investment plans.

It is important to appreciate that sewer overflows are just one factor with an impact on river water quality in the UK. The Environment Agency estimates that wastewater leads to around 30% of river and sea pollution in the North West, with the remaining 70% due to other causes, such as rain running off highways and farm land, and private drainage being incorrectly connected. The water industry has recently published a report which sets out ten key steps necessary to achieve the radical changes we all want for our rivers and waterways which you can read here: [www.water.org.uk/rivers](http://www.water.org.uk/rivers)

We signed a partnership with The Rivers Trust in July 2021 which will help improve the collaboration between everyone who has an impact on the health of our rivers – United Utilities, local authorities, farmers, industry, government, regulators and others. Only by working together can we find cost-effective sustainable solutions to improve water quality.

Thank you for your interest in United Utilities and I hope my response assures you that we are committed to playing our part in improving the environment in the North West.

Yours sincerely



Steve Mogford  
Chief Executive