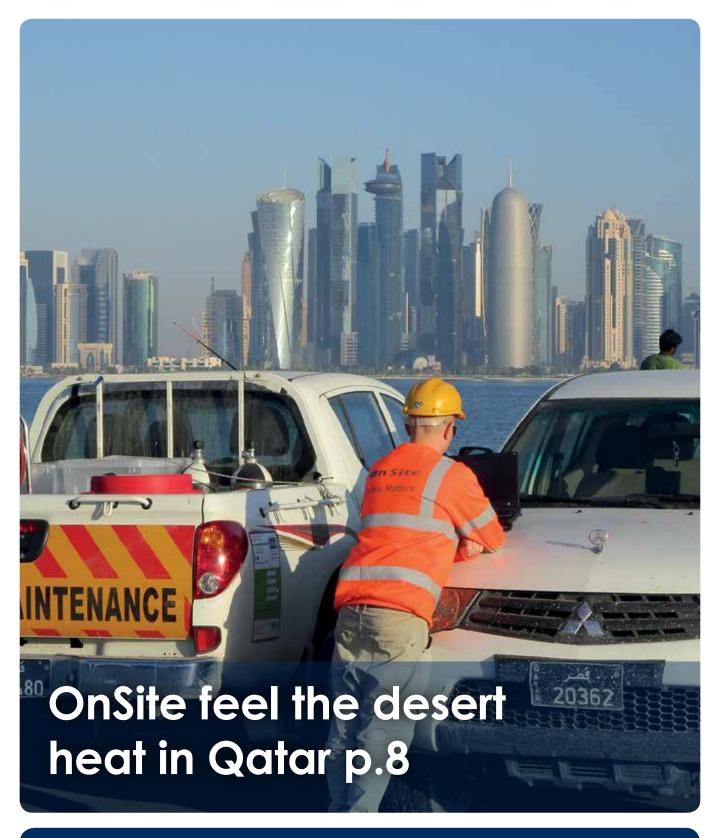
theLOP





Foreword from **Adrian Page**

Welcome to this revamped edition of The Loop! Following a number of comments after the last few copies we wanted to bring you a new look and feel, combining more business news and more about our people but with a continued focus on our community activities. Hopefully you like the new look, however please give us your feedback – positive or negative.

The last six months have been incredibly busy in all parts of the Group with a number of important operational successes. We also continue to deal with a changing regulatory environment, a changing economy including the aftermath of the Brexit vote, and a variety of other opportunities and challenges. I would like to thank all of you for your continued support and hard work as we look forward to 2017.

Financially, the Group as a whole is slightly behind its target at the moment. South Staffs Water, SSI and Office Watercoolers have all

traded broadly in line with their budgets. SSI is experiencing growth in all areas when comparing against this time last year, although some areas are behind budget, and SSI needs to remain focused if the full year budget is to be achieved. Unfortunately Echo has experienced a financially difficult year as, unlike previous years, Rapid sales have reduced as the focus of our clients has been on compliance with the new non-household market rather than enhancing the system. We are hopeful that this demand will return next year and I'm confident that with continued hard work, the Group will achieve its budget for the year.

I would also like to highlight the strong performance that we are seeing on Health and Safety. The importance and attention that is paid to it throughout the Group has resulted in a 35% reduction in the number of accidents so far this year and a 60% reduction in those resulting in lost time – let's keep up the good work.

Have a good Christmas break.

Adrian Page
Chief Executive,
South Staffordshire Plc

Your feedback...

It's important that we know what you think about how we communicate with you.

Do you like the revamp of The Loop? What other information should we be including?

Please let us know your feedback _ good and bad _ and any suggestions on how we

can improve our communications across Group.

Email **theloop@south-staffordshire.com** or speak to a member of the South Staffs Water communications team.



The next step towards Open Water

At the end of November, South Staffordshire Plc announced the formation of a joint venture with Pennon Group, combining our non-household retail businesses together to operate as Pennon Water Services.

This partnership is the latest step in a journey for the business to not only meet regulatory compliance but to also ensure we are in the strongest possible position to compete in the new environment when the retail market opens in April 2017.

With a combined customer base of 180,000 accounts, Pennon Water Services will be the fourth largest retailer in the non-household retail water market, with 8% market share. We will immediately have a bigger national footprint along with increased opportunities for growth and service delivery across the group; and by retaining existing in-area trading names in the South Staffs and Cambridge regions, our brands are protected.

Our ability to be able to enter into the joint venture was made possible by the work led by the Merlot, SSWB and Echo teams, but involving much of the business, that has been happening in the many months before the opportunity appeared.

A combined team from Echo, Rapid, Group IT, Merlot and SSW IT, removed non-Household (NHH) customer information from the existing RapidXtra and loaded it into a new version in order to allow for separate billing. Alongside this Echo set up operational teams and processes to separately deal with contact from non-household customers. A significant amount of effort went into this activity which enabled South Staffs Water to successfully join other water companies in the Shadow Market.

At the same time, the Wholesale division in Water has set up a Service Desk to receive and respond to new retailers and ensure a level playing field. Operational contacts from non-household customers are now being successfully passed to the new Wholesale Service Desk for action.

These are just some of the many milestones met in readiness for the market opening made possible by the hard work and support from across the business. As April 2017 draws closer, there will be more work to complete but the business is well positioned for the changes ahead.



Group Services gets engaged!

It's not wedding bells in the air, but happier and more motivated teams, thanks to 12 months of hard work by Group Services.

Following an Employee Survey in 2015 which showed a number of areas where improvements were needed, Group Services set up its own Change Team of employees from both the Finance and IT functions, to work with the HR and Management teams to address these issues and improve engagement levels across employees.

Projects have included:

- improving communications within the business
- enhancing the brand and reputation of Group Services
- arranging training in change management, equality and diversity and line management
- designing and implementing an Employee Recognition Award scheme
- organising charity events

Most recently, the team have launched a new Intranet site for Group Services which includes lots of useful news and information. HR advisor Charlotte Zeki said: "While it has been hard work completing these projects as well as our day jobs, the whole team has enjoyed the experience. We have gotten to know each other, learnt more about what other teams in our business do and we have widened our skills and experience outside of our job roles. The most rewarding aspect has been seeing the improvements across the teams; although we know we've got further to go!"

Group Services Director Jason Goodwin added: "This has been a fantastic effort by all employees, who have worked hard and with purpose and enthusiasm. The results are already being felt and the evidence of success has been reflected in our 2016 Employee Survey, which showed improvements across the board. Change is constant in the modern workplace, and we feel we're now in a much better place to continually drive, embrace and manage this."



New Group ePay system

The new online ePay system successfully went live for all Group employees in July 2016.

The online ePayslip replaces paper payslips for all employees, and allows you to:

- View your current payslip from any location, using any type of PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone with an internet connection.
- View your history of payslips from July 2016 onwards.
- View your current 2015-2016 P60 annual statement.
- Choose to receive notification of new payslips to work or personal email address.

If you want to login to ePay at work there is a link on the Groupnet home page. Copy the URL and save it in your web browser favourites at work, or on your personal device.

Your 2015-2016 P60 statement (showing how much taxable income you have earned, and the amount of tax you have paid in the last tax year) is now available to view online on the Group ePay portal. This and future P60 statements will be online, replacing the paper copy.

If you need assistance to get started with the ePay service contact Group Payroll who can offer advice and assistance – email: epayslipadmin@south-staffordshire.com or call 01922 618187 or ext 5395.



IWS Water Hygiene and Group Services improve service to customers

The IWS Water Hygiene team recently identified that the current software used on their existing hand held devices (PDAs) needed to be updated to ensure on-site operatives could use just one device to receive work orders, take photos, record site information and asset related data.

The solution needed to be implemented quickly and with no loss of service to the wide range of customers across health, education and food manufacturing industries, who rely on this crucial service. The Group Services IT team were asked to help solve this problem and have been working closely together with IWS Water Hygiene over the last few months to provide a solution which has now been successfully implemented.

Group IT Project Manager Dharmender Rai said: "This is a great example of how Group Services works together with teams across the Group to improve both software and hardware so that our businesses can continue to deliver exceptional customer service.

With technology changing so rapidly, it is important that we try and make sure that the solutions we provide will last as long as possible, as well as allowing teams to work smarter. Group Services' project management team aims to ensure that projects run as smoothly as possible and that everyone is kept up to date with important information, training and deadlines."



IWS Water Hygiene Director Chris Brown added: 'We needed to make these changes to make sure that the services we provide to our customers remain of the highest quality, while at the same time making the jobs of our operatives quicker and easier and therefore more efficient. This new technology allows our teams to use a single tablet to manage their work. I am pleased to say that the project ran smoothly, to deadline and requirements and the new system is working well."



Electric Ireland chooses Echo's Field Agent Services

Here at Echo, we're delighted to have recently been chosen by Electric Ireland as their preferred supplier to deliver a range of field agent services across both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

This is an important strategic growth win for us, as we take our debt services outside of the UK mainland for the first time, and one which opens up further future opportunities for us within the Republic of Ireland.

Our team will be re-establishing and maintaining contact with Electric Ireland's in-debt customers and providing effective and efficient services including: obtaining meter readings, agreeing and setting up appropriate payment plans, agreeing PAYG meter installs, identifying vacant properties, confirming customer move details, and carrying out fraud assessments where required.

Echo beat a number of other providers to be named the sole provider of services, with Electric Ireland impressed by our strong utilities heritage and proven



experience. The contract is for two years and we anticipate that work will commence in January 2017.

More Award Recognition for Echo

Echo, together with our client Northern Ireland Water, were delighted and proud to win the Customer Facing Team of the Year award at the recent prestigious Utility Week Awards in London, beating five other shortlisted finalists in the hotly contested category.

Our entry focused on Echo's field-based Customer Liaison Officers, with the judges praising Echo and NI Water for "showing great tenacity in transforming relationships with even the most difficult to reach and vulnerable customers in Northern Ireland."



Echo has also recently been named a finalist in the 2017 Institute of Customer Service UK Customer Satisfaction Awards. Our work with longstanding client The Financial Times has been shortlisted in the best customer feedback strategy category. Winners will be announced In London on March 7th 2017.



The Secrets of Better Billing: UK consumers have their say

Following on from our recent published research reports on customer service and debt collection, we recently asked a representative sample of 1,000 UK consumers to tell us about their billing experiences with every day service providers.

We quizzed them on how they prefer to receive their bills; the impact of online billing; good practice experienced; common issues that frustrate them; which sectors they think are getting it right and the impact of issues on supplier choice.

The findings are outlined in Echo's new consumer research report "The Secrets of Better Billing" which can be downloaded from our website.



The research has been well received by industry publications and the general business press with extensive coverage already generated. This helps us to continue to raise Echo's profile

within the wide range of titles read by our target clients, and to position the company as a true customer journey thought leader.

National Customer Service Week – a time to celebrate

Across the UK in October, many businesses were taking part in The Institute of Customer Service's National Customer Service Week, and Echo was no exception. It's an opportunity to raise awareness of customer service and the vital role it plays in successful business practice.

Victoria Procter, contact centre manager at Bristol and Sarah Willis, collections team manager at Walsall organised and ran an activity packed week for our contact centre teams. With daily competitions focused on the week's themes and Echo's values, we were delighted to take the time to celebrate excellent customer service, and our people and their successes.

"It was really fantastic to see all the great activities and challenges taking place across Echo in recognition of National Customer Service Week. Great customer service is something we deliver day in day out across all our operations on behalf of clients, and to take the time to recognise and celebrate that has been brilliant." Monica Mackintosh, Customer Services Director.



OnSite feel the desert heat in **Qatar**

OnSite Worcester was awarded the contract to undertake a major drainage flow and rainfall monitoring survey programme in late 2015 in Doha, Qatar.

OnSite is working in partnership with HBK Engineering Services, ultimately for the Ashghal Public Works Authority, undertaking flow and rainfall measurement and impermeable area studies (IAS) in and around Doha and some catchments to the far North and South of the city.

The flow measurement equipment was packed and shipped in March 2016 and once customs clearance had been given, flow measurement teams were mobilised in mid-April. Andi Cresswell, Steve Heppelthwaite, James Fowler and Ryan Walker were closely followed by the IAS crew, John Povey, leaun Harris, Dean Hopps and Ricky Rowley. Due to tight deadlines there was no time for acclimatisation to temperatures racing into the mid-30s at that time of year.

Due to the rigorous procedures in the Middle East the flow survey teams were initially limited in their activities, and only allowed to carry out surveys from the surface. This exercise was carried out during the day, but it soon became apparent that pre-inspection would have to be undertaken on night shifts due to the heat - though temperatures do not drop that much even at night!.

The IAS team fared slightly better, knocking on doors and drinking coffee with the locals. The Qataris were very welcoming and in fact at one property, seeing the team admiring the car parked on the driveway, the owner threw the keys to John for his 1950s Mercedes and simply said "bring it back when you are finished with it". Generally that was the reception received, warm and friendly. Obviously the IAS teams had no option but to work through the day to gain access to properties; although not the most physically demanding work, the heat took its toll and the team really knew they had done a shift at the end of the day!.

By the time all permissions, permits and traffic management plans had been approved, the flow measurement team could commence pre-site inspection and installations.

Unfortunately this was now June, with temperatures reaching the high 40s; this was coupled with uncharacteristically high humidity. There was no respite when entering the sewer either; even the storm lines were considerably hotter than the surface, with all sewer entries undertaken wearing full working breathing apparatus. Quite a task in the UK, let alone working in desert temperatures!.

The IAS work proved challenging from the start, with access issues, extreme temperature and the language barrier, coinciding with Ramadan falling in June this year. Nevertheless, all site work was completed by mid-August and the data obtained was of a very high standard - thanks to the team carrying out such a difficult survey in an extremely proficient and professional manner.

The flow survey commenced 21 August, with completion projected for August 2017. The fortnightly maintenance and calibration checks are demanding. Although the weather is now more favourable, conditions are still

"Due to tight deadlines there was no time for acclimatisation to temperatures racing into the mid-30s at that time of year."



extremely harsh, and the team will have to endure another long hot summer next year.

We're also very proud to report that to-date we are approaching 4000 man hours worked in Qatar, with zero incidents recorded. On Site working in partnership with HBK Engineering Services, undertaking flow and rainfall measurement and impermeable area studies (IAS) in and around Doha.



Continuing a commitment to helping low income households

South Staffs Water has introduced a new social tariff, following positive feedback from customers in both regions who supported the company's proposals to provide additional help for people struggling with paying their water charges.

The new Assure tariff has been available since May and will help make water bills more affordable for eligible customers by offering a reduction of between 20% and 80%.

Rachel Barber, Customer Services Director, said: "We already have one of the lowest bills for water in the country, but we are always looking for extra ways we can help anyone who is having genuine payment difficulties.



"We have been making sure as many of our customers as possible are aware of Assure with promotional activity including text messaging and advertising in local newspapers and on bus panels."

The tariff is available to customers with a household income of less than £16,105, excluding income from Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments

and Attendance Allowance. It is just one of a range of ways the company offers help and advice on managing water bills; ranging from contact information for other organisations that can help with debt advice, to installing water meters and providing free water efficiency devices to better manage water consumption.

Further information is available on the company websites.

Double Success in Customer Service

South Staffs Water is celebrating a double success after being officially recognised for providing exceptional levels of service to its customers.

The water company has been awarded third place in Ofwat's coveted customer service league table, in which the regulator ranks each of the UK's 18 water and sewerage companies on a range of performance measures.

It has also received credit from the industry's watchdog, the Consumer Council for Water, as the company with the third lowest number of customer complaints achieved through a fall of 32.5% on the previous year.

Rachel Barber, Customer Service Director, said: "We are exceptionally proud to have been recognised in quick succession for providing excellent and improving levels of service for our customers. "When you combine this with the fact that South Staffs Water's bills are among the lowest in the country, it demonstrates our strong commitment to putting customers first."

Meet the Apprentices

There has been some new faces in the Water company over the past few months following the appointment of seven apprentices across the South Staffs and Cambridge regions.

Since starting in September, the apprentices have each been rotating across the Wholesale division and spending time in each department.

Harry is a passionate and dedicated Cambridge United supporter who has described his time so far at Cambridge Water as 'phenomenal!'

"I have already acquired so many skills, both technically and socially. I have received a great amount of support so far from the company and in particular my mentor. Rotating around the business allows me to get a feel of all aspects of the company which is fantastic."

16 year old Aston Villa supporter Sam completed his GCSEs in June and has so far spent time in Water Quality and Asset Management: "The part of the apprenticeship I have enjoyed the most since I joined has been learning the underground networks of the business and how much water goes through our pipes and treatment each day."

Callum has spent time in Operational Technology and with the DLO team: "I've learned a lot of stuff that I didn't even know existed before I started. I'm really enjoying my time with South Staffs Water and hopefully there are many years to come!"



Five apprentices (Gareth Hall, Callum Grocutt, Sam Perks, Tom Morley and Samsher Sahota) have been appointed across the South Staffs region.





Michael Spaans (left) and Harry Bray (right) are working in the Cambridge region.

Each apprentice has been assigned a mentor to guide and support them in their first year. They are responsible for looking after the apprentices, arranging their placements, performing postplacement reviews and appraisals.

The mentors and apprentices recently enjoyed a team building day at the Albion Foundation where they were challenged to work together, helping to get to know each other participating in a paralympic games. Marcella Nash, Director of Human Resources at South Staffs Water, said: "It's great to have been able to be able to bring young talent in the business and water industry. This is the first time the

business has recruited apprentices in eight years and represents our commitment to invest in future talent and part of our succession planning initiative."





Echo Northern Ireland – celebrating 10 years in business

In November, Echo's Northern Ireland operation marked its 10 year milestone anniversary and the team celebrated the special occasion with a party at the Hilton Hotel in Belfast.

Over 100 employees attended and enjoyed some superb food, a few beverages and a great evening of entertainment.

It was great to see that many employees in Northern Ireland were also celebrating 10 years of long service; having joined the operation back in 2006 at its formation. During the last decade, change and growth within the operation has led to many opportunities arising for employees to develop and grow, and here two of the many employees celebrating reflect on their journey with Echo:



"In the time I have worked for Echo in Belfast, just over 10 years, I have been supported and encouraged in developing my career. From starting work as a Team Manager in our Contact Centre I have progressed into a full time training role, which has enabled me to expand my skills and knowledge in different areas of the company. Friendships have formed with colleagues across the business and the most positive part of my experience with the company is the people."

John Murdock (Trainer)

"August 2016 saw me reach the 10 year Milestone for working with Echo – I joined the CRC Team, where I have remained and helped with the implementation of the Contact Centre which was challenging - but 10 years on seeing how we have developed the service has been rewarding and during this time I have been lucky to have opportunities for my own self-development as I completed a 6 month secondment as Service Delivery Manager."

Gail Boyd (CRC Team Manager)

About Echo Northern Ireland

140 people currently work in Echo's Northern Ireland Operation, providing an outsourced end to end customer contact management service for Northern Ireland Water 24/7, 365 days a year. The team recently secured an additional new £4million metering and billing contract with Northern Ireland Water and are taking on an additional 24 team members as the operation continues to grow.

Changing Faces in Water

As the water industry goes through significant change with the introduction of competition in the retail business, the water company has responded with its own changes.

Ahead of Asset and Water Supply Director Colin Wayper, retiring from his role in April after 17 years, the Wholesale division has restructured the team.

Andrew Lobley will move from his current position as Head of Water Quality and Compliance to the new role of Director of Operations with responsibility for day to day operations from source to tap across the Midlands region. Andy Cuthill, will continue to provide the same in his role as Head of Operations in the Cambridge region.

Working alongside Andrew, David Essex will join the business as the new Head of Wholesale Service Delivery. He will be responsible for service improvement, control rooms, retailer relationships, Market Intelligence and reporting.

These positions will report into Wholesale Service Delivery Director

Pete Aspley alongside the role of Head of Asset Management.

Current Head of Asset Management Caroline Cooper is in the process of transitioning into the new position of PR19 Lead, where she will manage a team to prepare and submit the Water company's business plan for the next 5 year AMP (Asset Management Period).

This role will report directly into Managing Director Phil Newland as well as Elinor Cordiner, the newly appointed Head of Water Quality and Compliance. Elinor joins in January from Severn Trent and brings a wealth of experience from both industry and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI).

The business is also welcoming David Kinsey into the role of Financial Controller to oversee the Finance, Procurement and Facilities teams. He has extensive commercial experience having worked for



Colin Wayer, Asset and Water Supply Director

a number of years for Celesio, the parent company of Lloyds Pharmacy.

Phil Newland said: "It's important that we make sure we're equipped to respond to the many changes that are happening in the water industry. These new appointments are exciting for the business and mean we have the right mix of people, skills and experience to operate successfully both today and in the future."

Long Service Celebrations in Water

A group of 11 employees from the Water company recently marked collectively clocking up over 300 years of service with a celebratory dinner at Swinfen Hall.

Nine members of staff were recognised for 25 years of service, while Steve Colella and Bob Ellwood each celebrated 40 years with the company. Terry Goodyear and John Stone have also marked 40 years of service this year.

Phil Newland, Managing Director, said: "It's wonderful to have employees that have been with the business for such significant periods of time. I'd like to thank them for their contribution over the years, during which time they will



have built an invaluable wealth of knowledge and experience which we benefit from every day."

Heritage Open Day success at Maple Brook

More than 50 people recently visited Maple Book Pumping Station near Burntwood, organised by South Staffs Water as part of the Heritage Open Days initiative.

Built between 1908 and 1915 in a neo-classical style and originally powered by steam, it was electrified in 1974 and most recently underwent a complete refurbishment in 2011. This included the development of two new boreholes which has secured the output capability.

The Grade II listed building, which still has its original triple expansion steam engine still in situ, is not normally open to the public.

Head of Production Paul Martin, said: "As an operational site, access is normally restricted but we saw the Heritage Open Days scheme as a great opportunity to show members of the public the inside of a pumping station and were overwhelmed by the response.

"Visitors were able to see the original steam engine which was in use until 1972, alongside the modern day equipment and technology we use to provide a reliable, high quality supply of water to our customers."



The day was supported by South Staffs Water staff and a team of volunteers from Lichfield Waterworks Trust, who helped welcome visitors and explain the heritage of the water company and the pumping station.

Mike makes Mountain & Desert Trek

Mike Fray in Hydrosave has recently completed a 53 mile walk over two days in the Atlas Mountains and Sahara desert in aid of FPIES UK.

The charity supports children with a serious food allergy that affects the gastrointestinal tract, and is aiming to get information about the condition into every GP surgery in the UK.



After 18 hours of walking, 30 litres of water, 4 toenails falling off and 2 very big blisters, Mike isn't finished as he's since signed up for a 100km walk from Bath to Cheltenham in 24 hours. Get in touch with Mike to find out more or make a donation.

Sponsorship of a Successful Season



The Under 10s team at Pelsall Villa FC is wearing its kit with pride this season, courtesy of Group's Youth Team Sponsorship.

The team, who play in the Walsall Junior Youth League, are enjoying a successful year so far, scoring a total of 61 goals to clock up an impressive 14 wins, 1 draw and only 3 losses. They have also recently defended their champions' title in the Autumn trophy event for a second season in a row.

Volunteering is a Sweeping Success

Group Services recently ventured into doing a little more than raising money by arranging for seven employees to go out and lend a helping hand to a local charity and volunteering to go over to Acorns Children's Hospice for a day to help clear out the site.

Acorns is a registered charity offering a network of care across the West Midlands for children facing life limiting illnesses. Having children is a blessing and a test but what is a much bigger test is having a child with an illness that shortens life expectancy. Acorns exists to help the children and families in need of help and support. The hospices are funded to ensure that the families affected are able to stay with their child and have 24/7 access to the care they need.



Group Services would like to say a special thank you to Natasha Dussaye, Chris Whittaker, Amy Clark, Kay Reid, Kamal Gautam, Colin Brown, Jason Goodwin and Dharmender Rai for taking the time out of their busy work schedules to help this incredible cause.

The volunteers spent their day clearing out the hospice, which included all of the bedrooms and a good sweeping of the garden. This meant stepping away from the usual working day and getting stuck

into some scrubbing and polishing. It was a long day of hard work as there was a lot to get through but the volunteers did a fantastic job and made that all important difference.

Group Services are looking forward to arranging a second volunteer day with Acorns which is set to take place in the spring/summer of 2017, where more focus will be placed on gardening ready for the sunshine.

Support for Remembrance parades

Employees from South Staffs Water and Onsite were among more than 30 volunteers from utility companies who joined together to provide steward support with Dudley Council staff at 13 parades across the borough, including the main parade in the town centre.

The parades give local people the opportunity to pay their respects to those that have lost their lives in conflict.

Councillor Hilary Bills, said:
"We approached the utility
companies' to help support the
events as the police are no longer
stewarding the parades.

"At a time when our finances are under increasing strain, we are extremely grateful for their support which meant that smaller community parades could also go ahead as planned."



WaterAid

The WaterAid charity was set up by the water industry 35 years ago in response to the global water and sanitation crisis. The business is currently supporting a WaterAid project in Central Madagascar.

Currently half of the population in Madagascar (11 million) lack access to safe water, whilst 80% (17.5 million) are without a safe place to go to the toilet. The three year project will reach people in two rural municipalities, who have some of the poorest rates of access to water and sanitation.

WaterAid will use the money we raise towards constructing six gravity flow water systems with 131 water

points in the communities, including in eight schools. This will require establishing and training 131 local water point committees and six water user associations with 435 members to manage the new water points. They will also be improving sanitation and hygiene in schools, by building eight school lattine blocks and establishing school health clubs to train members on the importance of hygiene.

This project will reach over 35,000 people with safe water, and over 8,800 people with improved sanitation and hygiene and is already making a difference.

Both Felix and Linah live in Bevato village in the Bongolava region of Madagascar:



"Taking care of the infrastructure is my priority because having safe running water has changed our lives and I don't want my family and the whole community to drink dirty water anymore. I love my community and I know that they need someone like me to maintain the water system."

Felix, a local technician working at water point number 12



"Before, fetching water was the toughest task I had to deal with but now it's the easiest as the new fountain is nearby, just behind our house."

Eight year old Linah

Get involved with supporting WaterAid.

The WaterAid committee is always in need of support from colleagues from across Group to help raise awareness and fundraise for the charity. If you want to know more, have an idea or suggestion or can volunteer your time, please contact Laura Evans – WaterAid committee secretary – lauraevans@south-staffs-water.co.uk



