



## Makerfield Pledge - Explainer text

### 1) Bring United Utilities into public ownership

United Utilities has paid out [£1.7bn to shareholders](#) in the years 2020-2025. That's the most of any water company. And customers are footing the bill for these eye-watering payouts. This April, United Utilities pushed the [average water bill up to £660](#). This is despite soaring profits of over [£630m in 2025](#), a 31.5% increase on the year before.

**During a cost of living crisis, United Utilities are extracting more and more from the pockets of billpayers in order to grow the wealth of faraway shareholders.** Combined, American asset management firms BlackRock and Lazard Asset Management - alongside the Qatar Investment Authority - own [one third of the utility](#).

As well as increased bills, these **shareholders directly benefit from a crumbling service and the destruction of our environment.** Water companies funnel more of our money into the pockets of bosses and shareholders by neglecting to invest in essential infrastructure. This results in water outages, flooding and sewage pollution. In 2025, **United Utilities dumped sewage into waterways in Makerfield for over 3000 hours**, with Borsdane Brook being the most polluted. United Utilities is decimating precious natural habitats across the North West. Sewage poured into Lake Windermere by United Utilities is [killing the lake](#) and causing [severe danger to public health](#).

### How can we afford to buy back United Utilities?

There is no fixed formula for appropriate compensation under UK law. Any compensation is subject to argument and negotiation (as Starmer is currently doing with the compensation claim by the owners of British Steel for the government's proposed nationalisation of the company).

United Utilities shareholders' net extraction from the company was [nearly £15 billion](#) from 1990 to 2023, which should be taken into account. [Feargal Sharkey](#) has argued that the liabilities created by private water companies failing to invest should be added to their balance sheets. This would reduce the profitability and therefore the market value of United Utilities significantly.

United Utilities is an asset with a guaranteed revenue stream because of the bills that households must pay. Under public ownership, the money now being spent on dividends and debt would be saved. [Around a third of water bills](#) is currently wasted in this way. In other words, Makerfield residents are **paying a 35% privatisation tax for water**.

United Utilities has a **25 YEAR notice period** on [its licence](#)! The government could change this. For example, the rail companies running franchises under privatisation had three month notice periods.

## 2) Bring Electricity North West into public ownership

*Makerfield households pay energy supply companies, who pay the companies who own and run the electricity and gas distribution and transmission grids. These monopolies, like the water companies, charge for distributing electricity or gas over their networks.*

**Wherever you are in the UK, [a QUARTER](#) of your energy bill funds the grid costs.** In 2022, Common Wealth research reported in the Financial Times that UK gas and electricity distribution companies have [higher profit margins](#) than any other sector, **up to 42.5% of pure profit!**

Electricity North West is 88% owned by the Spanish energy group Iberdrola, 12% owned by Japanese firm Kansai Electric Power. **Last year Electricity North West paid out £45 million in dividends**, equivalent to £19 per household or 7% of the network cost included in electricity bills. Under public ownership, this money would not leak out, and could instead be used to reduce bills or invest in infrastructure.

Electricity North West is rated [1.9 on Trustpilot](#) by its “customers” (who don’t have a choice). [A 2023 report](#) for the government found that “Development of new transmission infrastructure currently takes twelve to fourteen years” and that the energy transition has been slowed down by lack of investment in the grid. Renewable energy developers have been told they have to **wait until the 2030s for connections**. In 2011, Ofgem gave Electricity North West a [£100,000 fine](#) for failing to comply with its licence in terms of providing quick connections.

### How can we afford to buy back Electricity North West?

There is no fixed formula for appropriate compensation under UK law. If it was based on returning to the shareholders the actual value of the share capital they have injected, **the cost of compensation for Electricity North West would be recovered in less than 6 years**. That’s because the shareholders of Electricity North West have £242.8m of share capital on the balance sheet, equivalent to slightly over five times the annual dividend. Read more in [this briefing](#) from the Public Services International Research Unit.

Like United Utilities, Electricity North West has a **25 YEAR notice period** on [its licence](#)! The government could change this. For example, the rail companies running franchises under privatisation had three month notice periods.

## 3) Bring Cadent Gas into public ownership

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Cadent Gas is owned by an international consortium of financial groups, including the Australian asset management firm Macquarie (26%) and the Chinese sovereign wealth fund (17%). The dividends paid out by Cadent Gas amounted to **£38 per household in 2025** – 19% of the money collected from customer gas bills by the grid monopoly. Under public ownership, this money would not leak out, and could instead be used to reduce bills or invest in infrastructure.

In 2019, Cadent Gas was [fined a record £44 million](#) by Ofgem after leaving households disconnected, failing to pay compensation and losing records for 775 high rise blocks of flats - which meant they were not part of its regular inspection or maintenance programme.

In the year 2024/25 the chair of Cadent Gas was Sir Adrian Montague, who was paid [£345,000](#). At the same time he was and is chair of Thames Water, which was and is a financial and environmental disaster, for which he was paid [£350,000](#).

#### **How can we afford to buy back Cadent Gas North West region?**

There is no fixed formula for appropriate compensation under UK law. Cadent Gas has just £0.169m of shareholder capital on its balance sheet. This represents a tiny proportion of the dividend paid in 2025, so the **cost of this level of compensation would be recovered in less than 4 hours** by the savings from not paying dividends. Read more in [this briefing](#) from the Public Services International Research Unit.

Like United Utilities and Electricity North West, Cadent Gas has a **25 YEAR notice period** on [its licence](#)! The government could change this. For example, the rail companies running franchises under privatisation had three month notice periods.

#### **4) Set up a new publicly owned bus company for Greater Manchester**

Andy Burnham has introduced the very successful BeeNetwork for Greater Manchester, delivering better buses through public control. The next step is to set up a publicly owned bus company so that all profits can be reinvested back into the network.

Publicly owned companies like Lothian Buses and Reading Buses which survived Thatcher's deregulation have won many awards. [The best bus networks](#) have **BOTH public control of networks and publicly owned companies running services**.

#### **5) Withdraw Greater Manchester pension fund from its deal with BlackRock/NHS**

As revealed by the Financial Times, the Greater Manchester Pension Fund has recently launched [a joint venture with American asset management firm BlackRock](#), which will see hundreds of GP surgery buildings end up in BlackRock's hands.

This deal could result in GP surgeries, including many in the Greater Manchester area, facing rent increases, **leading to money that should be used for treating patients being paid out to a US multinational corporation.**

Private equity giants, who have a history of prioritising profits over people, should be nowhere near our NHS. The next MP for Macclesfield must commit to putting pressure on the Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, which manages GMPF, to withdraw from this damaging joint venture with BlackRock.