



The voice for water consumers  
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

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## **Ad hoc Accountability Session for South East Water**

**2ND FEBRUARY 2026**

## Attendance list

David Hinton	CEO of South East Water
Rob Crumbie	Head of Communications for South East Water
Douglas Whitfield	Water Supply Director for South East Water
Nicky Taylor	Director of Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead facilitator
Robert Wilson	Chairman of the Consumer Council for Water (CCW)
7 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under South East Water

**CCW Chair:** Thank you very much for attending this Accountability Session for South East Water and obviously its customers. I'm Robert Wilson. I am the chairman of the Consumer Council for Water and we exist to advocate for and to support customer interest. So that's why we're here tonight. We undertake research, gather information, and we present the customer view to stakeholders in the water industry. So that's our job. So tonight is the, as I said, the first session like this, and it forms part of our Water Voice program where we provide customers with a very structured opportunity to question senior leaders about things that have happened in the past, what's changed since then and what must change going forward. It is our first session, as I say, and that means we may not get everything absolutely right on the first time, but what I do think we will get from this session is we will endeavour to get all the key issues onto the table and get the answers that customers want from that.

First company in the hot seat tonight, and thank you for coming, is South East Water. And we're going to focus on the Pembury outage as everybody I hope is aware of now. And we're going to test the adequacy of the company's responses and try to agree a clear, specific set of actions that customers can expect to see delivered in the following period. Now that we know, we all know that Pembury had a significant impact on thousands of South East Water customers in this area and it's been a source of ongoing discussion and debate.

So just to clarify some things at the outset, this is not a complaints hearing, it's not a technical inquiry. It's about accountability, learning and agreeing clear actions that customers expect to see delivered in the future. The session operates under CCW's published consumer panel Terms of reference and that sets an expectation for respectful but challenging discussion, one person speaking at a time and a focus on practical time-bound actions at the end of it. And I can also confirm that this session intends to be completely customer-led and led by their questions, focused on future change, not blaming anybody for anything. And the meeting will be fully transcribed and published for transparency.

So with that, I think, let's get underway. And can I just begin with a couple of introductions? The customers will get a chance with Nicky Taylor in a few minutes to say a bit about themselves. But firstly, South East Water we have David Hinton and we also have, is it Rob Crumbie. So thank you to you two. And there's going to be Douglas Whitfield coming in for the other questions. So with that I'm going to introduce you pass over to the Lead Facilitator from Taylor McKenzie who are helping us run these sessions as our lead facilitator. So over to you, lead Facilitator.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, Robert. Good evening, everyone. I'm Nicky Taylor. I'm the Managing Director at Taylor McKenzie Research [TMcK]. We're helping CCW to facilitate these sessions and make sure that customers feel comfortable taking part in them, their voices are heard and that the process runs smoothly. As Robert has mentioned, I'm going to go through some housekeeping, talk a little bit about how the session itself is going to run and then we're going to get started.

So, there's lots of recording going on this evening, that's so that we can get a full transcript of what is said. Those transcripts will be shared with the customers before they are published within five days. And that will give you guys an opportunity if you want to redact anything personal that's been said or anything like that. So, there's an opportunity there to take that forward. The session itself will then create action plans

that can be taken away by South East Water and you're going to have 28 days to respond with their own company action plan, which we will be able to review as customers and decide if it ticks all the boxes we're looking at it to do.

I think in terms of some housekeeping, there's no planned fire alarms for this evening. If we do hear a fire alarm, this is our door that we're going to be exiting from. The fire exit to our right-hand side here.

In terms of the session itself, it's a very simple approach that we're going to be taking for the session. There are going to be three questions in total, which we have all agreed on as customers at the briefing session we held last week. A customer has been assigned a question; they're going to ask that question. There's going to be around about five minutes for South East Water to respond and talk a little bit about, talk to that question. As you're responding the customers are going to be taking lots of notes on their reaction sheets. And once you've finished, we're going to have a discussion as customers, which will last about 10 to 15 minutes, where we'll go through all the notes that you have and bring to life your lived experiences, what impact you've seen and what you'd like to see as an action.

As that's happening, we're going to have a screen behind us that's going to be collating those actions. We've got a team next door who will be listening in, and they'll be listing the actions that are coming out as the discussion progresses. Robert's then going to sort of take the floor and go through the actions that are there. And as customers, we're going to agree if those actions are representative of what's been said.

Once that's happened, South East will have a chance to have a bit of a sort of a conversation around what those actions might mean, whether they're doable, what they look like to you as a company. And once that's done, we're onto the next question and the process repeats itself. Like I said, it's going to be three times. After the second question has come to a conclusion, there'll be an opportunity for teas, coffees, refreshments, and if everything goes to plan from a timing perspective, we should be finished by 8 o'clock. Okay.

So just to reiterate what Robert has said, if we could all speak one at a time, if that's all right. Just purely, it helps with the transcript, it helps everyone understand what's being said. I believe that is us ready to go.

So, I think what would be great is if I could go around the room one at a time and get you all just to introduce yourself, just first name a bit about yourself and then we can, we can take it from there. So, I'll start to my left-hand side.

**Community Member 1:** My name's Community Member 1 and I live just outside Tunbridge Wells.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's great, Community Member 1. Thank you.

**Community Member 2:** Hi, I'm Community Member 2. I have two children. I'm also a carer for my mother and father who are elderly and I'm just outside Salford, Surrey.

**Community Member 3:** I'm Community Member 3. I live in Sovereign Harbour, Eastbourne. My dad lives in Tunbridge Wells and has been severely affected by water outages, but I've only had limited water pressure issues.

**Community Member 4:** My name's Community Member 4, I'm from Helsham. That's it, really.

**Community Member 5:** Hi, I'm Community Member 5, I'm from Bexhill.

**Community Member 6:** Hi, I'm Community Member 6 from Staplefield and Haywards Heath.

**Community Member 7:** And I'm Community Member 7 from Sevenoaks.

**CCW Chair:** I'm now going to ask Community Member 3 to kick off with the first question. The question I hope will come up on the screen behind us so that you can see it at the end. And once Community Member 3 has asked their question, I'll ask South East Water to respond.

Just a reminder again to customers to note down anything on your sheets, but we're going to be looking for a brief explanation from South East Water on what happened, what's already changed and what you're proposing to do next. So, Community Member 3, if you could lead off your question.

**Community Member 3:** Okay. From the outset, inconsistent and conflicting updates led customers to lose trust in the information South East Water was providing. This mistrust made it harder for people to know what was going on and what guidance to rely on about supply restoration and water delivery, particularly [for] those vulnerable customers. The impact was felt across the wider community with significant traffic congestion caused by the queues for access to the water stations. And there was no consistency in what the message was or who was delivering it.

What specific steps has South East Water taken to ensure that in future outages communications are consistent and fit for purpose? How will you rebuild customer trust in your company's communications?

**CCW Chair:** So over to you to respond. You've got five minutes.

**David Hinton:** Five minutes. Okay, so I'll start. Thank you so much for your question. For those of you in Tunbridge Wells, I'm really sorry about interruptions. I know it doesn't affect all of you. I know some of you were affected. Genuinely, this is not what I'm trying to achieve, as you'll see, I think, from talking to us. Can I just give a bit of context on the messaging piece and the fact it felt like it was conflicting.

So, this was the scenario we were faced with, was Pembury went off. I won't go into it. It's not a technical meeting; I won't go into that. But suffice to say, we weren't clear on the outset what the remedy was going to be. So, we were trying things. So, as a contrast, if you get a burst in the main, we do about two and a half thousand of those a year. We've got a pretty good guess about how long it's going to take, so we can be pretty definitive about "This is going to take four hours". This one, we didn't really know what was going to solve the issue. It was a bit unusual. So, the first few updates were us

estimating, or in effect assuming, what we were going to do next was going to work. So, we were changing this and we were changing that, and “If that works, it will be back on tomorrow, so let's stick with that date. That's when we expect it to be coming back on”. And then that didn't happen because it ended up being more complex than we thought. And then the same thing happened. Then we ended up saying, “We can't give a resolution”.

It's really frustrating to be on the end of getting constant different dates. So, we then move to updates. “We're going to update you again at 8 o' clock the next day”. So, from our side, that was a bit of what was happening in our brains, if you like, when we were trying to communicate out to the customer. Do you want to add to that, Rob?

**Rob Crumbie:** Yeah. So, I sit here as both a customer and a resident of Tunbridge Wells. So, I was both an employee and affected, so I have both sides of the story. So, I'm from Southborough, so not far from you, Community Member 1. I think as David said, the challenge we had was, in a typical, and I say typical situations, so if we have a burst main, we know that there's a leak somewhere, we find it, we dig a hole, we fix the pipe, we reinstate and we put the water supply back on. And that tends to happen on a rhythm of its own. And that can be anything between 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, but it's very predictable.

I think the challenge with this incident was that because there was this raw water quality issue and there was the fact that it wasn't clear how we were going to fix it, we get feedback from customers, saying, “We really want to know when the water is going to come back on” and I get that and I understand that because I'm a customer too. If I haven't got water, I want to know when it's going to come back on. And our teams were trying to be as realistic and pragmatic as possible, to get that information to us.

Unfortunately, that moved and I put my hands up. We had seven restoration times. So that's what I know we went through because I run the communications team and I look at what we communicate and how we communicate. And the 'What' bit is tricky and I understand that and I think if you move expectations seven times, I don't think it's acceptable. I know it's not acceptable. You're going to tell me it's not acceptable. I think we all agree it's not acceptable. What we then were able to focus in on was 'how', 'How' we can actually communicate that.

So, during the course of the incident, we were regularly updating SMS messages. We sent 1.2 million messages during the course of the incident. We had media spokespeople out. But it was a tricky media environment because this was a time when the issue became quite politicised. So, we all know that our MP moved very much away from the public service message into a message that was questioning leadership and so forth, and that meant the media wasn't able to support us in the way it normally would do from a public service perspective. We briefed journalists and asked them to say “Look, customers haven't got water. We need to get a really vital message across”. But they wanted to talk about leadership, they wanted to talk about dividends, talk about finance, and that's really hard.

So, we did try to do that. The reality is that the likes of Fiona Irving, the likes of Matt Teale, they will go down their own journalistic route, and we can only brief and ask so much so that the public service message be put across. I think the one time, and I hope that this will be recognised, when we implemented the boil water notices on

Wednesday 4th December, we said to customers “It's going to be 10 days before your water will be drinkable without boiling”. So, you could have it for showering, you could flush your toilets and so forth. We actually delivered it in nine days.

**CCW Chair:** Rob, can I, sorry, just interrupt because the focus, I'd like to get the focus onto the question that the customers are asking, which is about the specific steps. We now understand a lot of the things that you know, and not a lot of that is new. I think if we could just move it onto the forward leaning bit of what steps you're taking.

**David Hinton:** Can I start on that? Because I'm really interested in your view on this because we struggle with this message. So, when there isn't and the other occasion this might happen is if there's really, really high demand in an area and we're struggling to meet that demand, we obviously don't know when the demand's going to come off because that is either weather-dependent, customer-dependent or something else. So, we've got a couple of scenarios, and the freeze-thaw is another one. When the restoration isn't super obvious to us as well, there isn't a definite end date. I can't say midday on Friday.

So, as a customer, would you prefer an estimated date that might be missed, or we are effectively doing all we can and we keep updating you on a regular basis? That's a really interesting question. If you are happy to pick it up, that's a really interesting question for me is “What would you like to hear in that [messaging] piece?”.

I know we've only got five minutes. Can I do the traffic piece?

**CCW Chair:** You've got the floor for a couple minutes.

**David Hinton:** Yeah, sure. Picking up a bottled water station is one of the trickiest things to do. And we start by asking the local authority, where we had 17 options in Tunbridge Wells, before the event. So, we've got options everywhere, and it depends which one we use and how big the event.

But if you think about the criteria we're trying to pick, it's got to get a lorry to it, people need to be able to get to it themselves, it's not got to really be used by something else. So, one of the problems we have is it was Christmas and all car parks were fully used up. It's got to be safe; did I mention that one? And there's a few others that you sort of have to build into this list and try and find the one that's ideal. If we avoided traffic, for example, then that probably would have meant we are further out of town. And then we're worried about being a bit of a journey for those who are in-town. So, it's a tricky balance to go: “where should I put a bottled water station?”

So, we've opted for mainly talking to the local authorities and there's a thing that gets set up called a *Local Resilience Forum*, which has the police, the fire brigade, local authority, county councils, etcetera on it. We tend to run the options through those guys saying: “Where do you think we should put it?”. And it does change at different times of year. So somewhere we wanted to put it this time had a Christmas fair on, and it's not normally there, so we put it [bottled water station] somewhere else.

So, it is a tricky one. And again, we're trying to tick off and again input into it what you think makes the ideal bottled water station because as soon as you go, “It's easy for one thing”, you'll probably find it's hard for something else. Like if it's easy access, it doesn't

cause traffic, then it'll be hard for a lorry to get to. So that's how we can sort of think about the bottled water stations, and obviously you've got to have enough of them, and to try and reduce traffic.

Now in terms of what we're doing as well, one thing that was tricky was letting customers know the stock that was available at each bottled water station, and they were pretty much stocked the whole time. But there's always an occasion that we might have a two-hour gap because, just the pallets haven't turned up, to name one. So, we are looking at an app that effectively we can use and customers can use which has effectively got live stock of all the bottled water stations. So how much is it at each one and we're even looking at how busy it is so we can give it a red, amber, green. So, if you see a green bottled water station with quite a lot of stock, then that's obviously one that you will end up going to and that will end up coming amber. Then we can change them, then we can change the kind of like traffic light system.

**CCW Chair:** David, I'm going to have to just stop you for now. There'll be a chance to come back again. But I think we are going to hear from the customers and they've all been scribbling furiously down on their sheets. So please focus on whether the response answers your concerns. Okay. That's the key thing. And then I'll hand over to Nicky to facilitate this bit.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Fantastic. Thanks Robert. So obviously lots of writing has gone down on the sheets which is great. And you know, thanks to the South East Water team for raising some questions that you wanted to put to the group. I think that's absolutely what this is about. It's a collaborative approach. So, you know, let's take that on board and make sure that we're looking to give them the insights that they require to make the right actions.

So, I think just to kick us off, what do we think of what we've heard? Does anyone want to jump in? Community Member 2, do you want to get us started?

**Community Member 2:** Thank you for your response. You mentioned you sent 2.2 million messages. My particular concern is people who are vulnerable. I didn't hear you mention the word vulnerable in any of your responses. How is that trust going to be restored with those who are vulnerable? And how are you going to communicate to the vulnerable who do not have text messages, someone at their door?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, so I think that normally in a focus group you would come back in there. But I think that's an action that Community Member 2 is looking to have taken. So that will show up on the screen soon. And I'm sure their responses we can come too in a second. So thanks for that.

Has anyone got anything else regarding vulnerability that you think we could add on to what Community Member 2 has said there?

**Community Member 6:** What about the people that don't have access to internet, and how are you going to reach those customers that can't get online and so on? Because that can be difficult, like the elderly.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, great. Any other thoughts?

**Community Member 3:** I'm interested in- my dad lives in Tunbridge Wells and he's been affected an awful lot with outages, not just this time. His apartment's next to a school which interestingly was open, which is a bit strange when there's no water and they had a delivery of 12, I think it is, bottles. For a school, Primary school. It's got about 200 children, I guess, so that there was no thought of "Okay, this is the school I'm moving into" rather than individual customers. So those children could have all been vulnerable with illness from not washing hands or whatever it may be.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, great Community Member 3. Anyone? Community Member 1, what about yourself? What have you got written down there that you want to add in?

**Community Member 1:** I've got "shut the stable door after the horse has bolted" because, from what I can hear and I appreciate if you've got aging infrastructure and when something goes wrong, where to put the water depots and all this.

My broader point would be, how do we get to that point in the first place? As I say, I can appreciate, I know Tunbridge Wells area very well. Where do you put these stations? You've got to get lorries there; you've got to get customers there and everything else. So, it goes back. And I know it's not specifically to do with the Pembury water outage, but I worked in print for 40 years and the best way to get out of a problem was not to get into that position in the first place.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, great. Anyone else want to jump in?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, so on that point, why on earth in this day and age are we having plastic bottles of water? Surely there must be a way of pumping from another reservoir or trucking it in, getting the army involved, whoever, whatever, but water's a basic need. There must be a much better way of doing it than bottled water.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, great.

**Community Member 7:** We're talking about communication here. This is one of the questions and I think I find it quite - I mean I worked in banking. One of the things we did was - one of the key things was to have disaster recovery plans. That was really important, okay? To have the ability to pick it up, you know, if something failed, we would switch over to another dealing room or whatever it was. That was really vital to have a disaster route, to have a strategy.

It seems to me, with regards to communication, you didn't really have a strategy and you lost the room. And that's a very dangerous place to be. You lose the room, you lose the ability to talk and that's why you suddenly have politicians turning on you. Because this wasn't an isolated incident, let's face it. Pembury was just another incident, another outage. So, you were already sort of skating on thin ice with the general public in the Tunbridge Wells area.

So, you get to that point where you've lost trust, you've lost hearts and minds. So, you should have reacted a lot earlier to this because, you know, you've complained about infrastructure, you complained about global warming, more people working from home, you've made all your excuses. But then not to have a strategy for your communication, a strategy to put your water centres properly done. And then to ask us [what to do]. You're the leaders over there, you're the bosses. You know, you should

be managing this. This should be front and centre. This should be top of your list. To lead, to manage. That's what you're being paid for.

And I'm sorry to sound aggressive, but that's what people would say to me if I was doing that job. And it's really important that you understand that and that you do put these strategies in place, because you've said this about your infrastructure. It's very shaky. It's going to happen again. And, you know, it may happen in Tunbridge Wells again in the foreseeable future. You've got to be ready for that.

Okay, so we need to know what you're going to do and what that strategy looks like for communications, and in this case the bottled water.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, great Community Member 7. Thank you very much.

**Community Member 5:** Just a quick one. Is there a list of the vulnerable customers that you know of?

**David Hinton:** Yep.

**Community Member 5:** Can they all be delivered water too?

**David Hinton:** Yep.

**Community Member 5:** And is that part of the process? And will that be taken-

**David Hinton:** Yep, they will be on a Priority Services Register (PSR). We delivered about 32,000 deliveries to vulnerable customers in a period. So yeah, I've got a comment on a lot of those.

**CCW Chair:** We will come back to that.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah, yeah, we're going to hopefully capture all of them in the actions that we're hearing around the room, and then there'll be an opportunity for you guys to say, "Do you know what? That looks great." Or "there's a few issues here and there".

So, before we get to that, we've got more conversation to be had. Has anyone else got anything written down just in response to what you've heard so far that you want to put in?

**Community Member 2:** I think the biggest message here is how you're going to build the trust back because you don't have much trust at the moment.

**Community Member 7:** Agreed.

**Community Member 2:** So, as Community Member 7 [said] here, what is the strategy to build trust? Are you going to knock on people's doors? I'm not going to tell you what to do. But one example. What is the strategy to build trust?

**TMcK Facilitator:** So, why is trust important? What is it about it that, you know, it's been mentioned a few times here. So, as a group, what is it that you're looking for to create that trust? What's a good example of it?

**Community Member 6:** Reliable messages that you know [...] they say what they're going to do and they actually mean it. You know, when you send so many messages out and I think people were just getting frustrated because you said one day, then it got moved to another day and you know, people don't need that. Like water is an essential thing.

**TMcK Facilitator:** And what happens during that process, when you don't have the consistent messaging. What then happens as a result of that?

**Community Member 7:** The trouble is you allow other people, you know, you talked about, it gets politicised, you get the local journalists and they see an angle and I'm afraid to say it weakens your hand dramatically, very quickly as well. And therefore, you're just exposed as management, and it doesn't do you any good. It doesn't do your personal reputations any good at all and clearly doesn't do the business any good. And no one's a winner, are they?

So, if it's tightened up and that trust is never lost, but to rebuild the trust is going to take some time. You saw that. We've seen this with banks. It took a long time to build the trust. After the 2008, 2009 banking collapse, you know, you've had, you've seen it in all, you know, with various things where there's been a calamity and everybody is, "Oh, you're a banker, are you? Are you a water person, are you now?" You're probably getting a lot of that now, to be perfectly honest with you. And, you know, it was estate agents in the 80s and 90s, wasn't it? So, you know, you really, it will take time to build this back.

But it starts, to be honest with you. It starts with fundamentals. Okay? So next time there's an outage, you need to be ready, and you need to have discussed internally how you get your communication right, because it inevitably will happen. We know that. And every customer knows there's going to be another outage because Rome wasn't built in a day with this infrastructure, which is woefully inadequate for 2026. So that's the first stage of the rebuild, isn't it? To start, it's going to have to be baby steps, I think.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thanks, Community Member 7 and Community Member 1, what does good trust look like? What does a good reaction from a water company look like if there is an outage? What's the expectation from a customer perspective?

**Community Member 1:** Well, again, I have to agree with them to an extent. If you've got a problem and you don't know how long it's going to take, it's hard to message. But if you're sitting at home and you've got no water and no shower or toilet, you're not really seeing it from that perspective.

And again, I'm going to sound like a broken record here, but how do we get in this situation in the first place? It's crisis management. We shouldn't be in the situation where we're even having this discussion. The discussion should be "Why has it happened in the first place" in my view.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So, focusing in on the communication element of it, Community Member 3, what would good look like to you if it happens again? What are your expectations?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, well, water is essential, obviously, for life. So, my view would be that I'd be extremely anxious if I was a Tunbridge Wells customer and didn't

know whether I was supposed to be boiling my water. Where this water's coming from that you're delivering? Not health issues related to that, but you don't boil water if it's a chemical issue. So, it's just, it needs to be concise otherwise people get anxious and then that just feeds itself into panic. And yeah, it's difficult, but it has to be concise and believable.

**Community Member 7:** And I think, sorry to interrupt, but I think when you have, you have one person front and centre that they know they're going to go to, this guy and he's smart or a woman or, you know, whatever, it's a smiley person. People can relate to them, you know, and you send someone toward the same person every time, not different people.

And maybe that is yourself, David.

**David Hinton:** We had plenty of debate about that, actually.

**Community Member 7:** And you're the leader, so maybe you should be front and centre and just people get used to seeing your face, you know, and you're delivering good, bad or whatever indifferent news. But maybe you do more PR.

I think that's what we see in the modern society, isn't it, really? You know, the leaders are front and centre. They need charisma, they need that sort of thing just to sort of, to front the business. I think it's very important in this day and age. I think that's part of a management style, really.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, thanks very much, Community Member 7. Anyone else want to add anything that they've heard or anything that they've written down in front of them to get the point across?

**Community Member 6:** I like the idea of the app. I think that's quite a good idea because it'd be so frustrating, like traveling to a water site and you can't get the bottled water, it's running low. You know, there's lots of traffic. So that would, I think that would be really beneficial.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, Community Member 5, have you got anything you want to add in?

**Community Member 5:** I was just thinking that, you know, if you are affected by it, you want accuracy, accurate information. You want to trust that you're going to be taken care of. So, I would want to know that the app's already set up and I can just click on it and find out where my water is and when it's going to arrive. I don't think most customers had anything like that this time around.

They had a lot of questions and felt like they weren't getting the attention that they required. So, it's making sure that the customers have a good experience throughout, even when things go wrong.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, anyone else want to add anything before we move on?

**Community Member 2:** I mean, I would say in your defence, I think the local authority should be doing more to help you because they've got far more resources and they

know, you know, they empty the bins. They've got so many services out there. They could communicate with someone within your organisation. So that message, they're able to deliver leaflets on bin collections. And why can't they do the same for water.

I mean that collaboration between the local authority and South East Water I think may be something we could, could explore at some stage.

And you know they have a priority register. I know you mentioned it. So, a lot of people don't know how to get onto a priority register. They think they're not a priority customer because it's just a water service. But as soon as something bad happens, they become priority customers. So, when they think "Oh, actually I am a priority", these customers always were but they didn't register. So, I think that part of the local authority, sharing the data about people's special needs, is quite important.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's a good point about collaboration there in relation to them.

**Community Member 3:** Okay, there should be a contingency plan as well. I assume you must have one. But in that situation, Tunbridge Wells, for instance, it was so diabolical. Surely you should've called on help from outside, like the army. I don't know, spoken to government. Pumping the water, it's life and death in some cases. You need water. It needs to be a better contingency plan.

**TMcK Facilitator:** From a customer perspective, is that important to you?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, it is.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's the sort of response you would expect?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, totally. I'm shocked at that, that we have water stations. I just find that really bizarre.

**Community Member 6:** Old-fashioned.

**Community Member 3:** Why are they not pumping it or trucking it in from somewhere?

**TMcK Facilitator:** So, Community Member 6, you agree that that bit should be-

**Community Member 6:** Yeah, definitely. You just, you wouldn't think you'd have to travel to a place to pick up bottled water. You think that'd be a backup plan, wouldn't you? For such a large organisation.

**Community Member 3:** And I know they do. I mean, where I live, I get supplied by South East Water, but I get my water taken away by Southern Water, who have got their own issues, which this isn't what this is about. But they are trucking out the opposite because their waterworks are broken. So surely you could do the same by trucking in clean water.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, anyone else to add anything? I think we've got a good list of actions here that we can go through. Robert is going to take us through those.

But before we do that, is there any other opinions we want to get across?

**Community Member 6:** Could they knock on people's doors. Because I know when our energy has gone down, we've had people knock on the door checking in with people, seeing how they are, you know. I don't know if you could be able to do that, just to check in with the elderly, it's just a bit more reassuring, I think.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Great. Thanks, Community Member 6. Anything else before we hand over to Robert?

**CCW Chair:** Great, so what I'm going to do is, I'm going to go through the various segments. Probably, I'm not going to read those out. I'm going to sort of talk about the sort of, the wider environment for each of them.

So, if I could start with vulnerable customers, because we're talking about the 2 million messages you sent out.

I mean, can you look at reviewing the way you deliver bottled water to vulnerable customers? You know, this idea of knocking on people's doors to find those people that maybe don't have access. Is that something?

**David Hinton:** Yes. If I can explain what we do, then I'm really happy to have some suggestions about how to improve it. So, we do have a Priority Services Register, that is any customer that's got any vulnerability. So, it's quite a long list. So, it might mean we send bills in braille, etcetera, but there is a category within that which is effectively, you can't collect water. And to be able to tick that box, it can be as simple as you haven't got a car.

So, if you haven't got a car, you can go on our Priority Services Register and tick that up and we'll deliver and they're delivered to the door. We don't knock every time. We knock if there's a message, so we tend to knock.

We do share our lists with the local authority and they share it with us. And we try, we do that in advance, really. Our Priority Services Register is increasingly becoming an amalgamation of a number of lists. And at the moment we try and get a list from the electricity companies as well, try and make that as full as possible. My worst nightmare is we meet a vulnerable customer without water. I have to say, it's my worst nightmare. So, we try and max that out as much as we can.

We learned some stuff in this incident that we've now adopted. So, things like some customers can't actually lift the pallets, or not pallets, so we were breaking them up into their individual bottles so we could take them off the step. We're having to deliver some on the step because we were doing it 24/7 pretty much to make sure everyone got one. So sometimes it was very unsociable. So that's what we do.

What worries me is the people that don't register to some extent, because we check everyone that registers, make sure they get the water they should have done. And when you get a really big event, it's resourcing that delivery. Because we deliver to every one of them, 24, every 24 hours. So, what also worries me is that resourcing question, which we managed this time and we managed in the one after Christmas as well. But that's like I say, it's my biggest worry.

Do you want to add anything?

**Rob Crumbie:** Yeah, I was just going to say, and to your point, Community Member 2, about some of the and I think Community Member 6, you mentioned about customers that maybe can't be reached digitally. So, and that's really important because through normal channels we would want to supplement and talk to the media and make sure we get the message out. And we also tag a lot of our communications and say, "Look, you might have a neighbour next door who might not be online. Could you, can you knock next door and just check on your neighbour?" That kind of local community thing. We do lots of outbound calling as well.

So, we've got to register. Everybody pays their bills, so we know where they are and we've got a phone number. And if we can't reach them on mobile, we'll reach them on landline. If they don't have a landline, and there were 12 customers who didn't have a landline in this Pembury incident, we sent a person around and knocked on the door. We knew exactly who they were. So, we're really keen to make sure we reached absolutely everybody who's on our vulnerability list.

But something we're trying, and I'd be interested to get views as to if you think this is a good idea or not, is starting to look at sort of two-way messaging on things. So rather than us just sending a message out and saying, "Hey, you know, there's water coming" or "there's a problem" or that sort of thing, we might get vulnerable customers that might not be able to open the bottle, for example. So, you send a two-way message that says, "Oh, hey, text back yes. Or text back on behalf of. And we'll come and we'll send somebody out who can either move that or actually open the bottles for you, because that might be an issue".

The other thing that we're also considering is sort of help by proxy, if you like. So, for example, your dad who lives here but you don't, so you could nominate a neighbour or friend or somebody nearby who could be the trusted person, if you like, who could act on behalf of. And we could communicate with them, who could then communicate with your dad. Because we know we can't reach everybody.

It was a dozen people in this instance, out of 6,500, but it's still a dozen people that we still need to reach. So, these are things that we're trying and looking at now as a result of the feedback that we got from pre-Christmas, because we know there are gaps, there are opportunities. And hopefully there'll be things that we can do to make those who are vulnerable, their experience much more consistent and have access to, as you say, vital water.

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, but I don't know if it's an option because it's probably data protection. But the NHS would obviously have a list of people. If they're not giving out the data of what the actual ailment is, it might be worth having some collaboration go forward.

**Rob Crumbie:** This is an ongoing challenge, data sharing, and you're absolutely right, it's a GDPR issue. We would love to have data sharing agreements in place all over the place to ensure that we can share data. And in some borough councils, we have achieved that.

So, in Maidstone, we have a data sharing agreement with Maidstone Borough Council. We share data with them, they share data with us, we update. We had 600 people come forward during the incident that we added to vulnerability list, and we deliver water in 24 hours and then we have them on the list going forward.

And there is that transitional need as well. You know, people, I had surgery before Christmas, and I certainly would have been vulnerable because I had surgery and therefore, I would have been on a vulnerability list. And people, that does happen, but the last thing they think about is they adding themselves onto the PSR list. So, we always have that in there. But, yeah, absolutely agree with you. Data sharing.

We would like to do data sharing with all of our borough councils, but different councils have different attitudes and appetite for sharing that data with us and vice versa. So, it's certainly something we would like to do more of.

**CCW Chair:** Is it just councils you're looking at, or are you looking at all public organisations for that sort of thing? The NHS was mentioned, but there's also charities and other things as well.

**Rob Crumbie:** We are talking to one NGO. I believe it's one of the, don't quote me on this, it's one of the older charities. It might be Age UK. It might be. It's something on the, I haven't got the details.

**David Hinton:** I think so.

**Rob Crumbie:** Yeah, it's not my area, but it's certainly something we're looking at from an NGO perspective. To share that data, to close that gap.

**CCW Chair:** And is this app you're talking about, is that up and running or is it something you're planning to do?

**David Hinton:** Well, we've got it in beta form, so it's not out there yet, but we have. We started to develop already.

**Community Member 1:** So, you're talking about different apps to what I've got on my phone now.

**David Hinton:** It'll be linked to that. So, if you've got my account as your app, in there you'll be able to go, there'll be a bottled water station piece. That won't be another app.

**Community Member 1:** And I have got all that, that South East Water app on my phone.

**Community Member 2:** So that app isn't going to be used to communicate notifications to customers.

**Rob Crumbie:** Well, we've already got an app in place for that. So, we've got an App called AquAlerter, which every customer that we've got a mobile phone number for is automatically opted into. So, we can reach about 560,000 customers across our network.

It's not everybody. And to your point about reaching people who don't have a phone, that's why we have other ways of getting hold of people. And unless you opt out of it, which obviously you can, because it's your choice and you're right as an individual, that app exists today.

**David Hinton:** Geographically, it pings, so we can draw on the map the area that's affected and then we can SMS everyone who's inside that boundary.

**CCW Chair:** So, there's been a lot of questions on vulnerable customers, but I think what we need to get to is a plan of what you're going to do.

Are you going to undertake some sort of review of the whole thing? Are you going to, you know, have you got specific individual actions you've already thought about that you might deliver to help some of the areas that your customers are very concerned about. And can you summarise those?

**David Hinton:** Yeah. So, we've got the bottled water related ones. So, one thing that did come up is, if you've got a small rural community that's a bit outside of, say, Tunbridge Wells, but affected, and there wasn't so much in this one, but it was in the one after Christmas. We have small village communities. It's quite a journey to go to the ideal bottled water stations and they would like, if you like, a parish car park, drop off. It's pretty much unsourced in terms of people and we could drop off to those.

We've done that in the past but then as soon as, with social media, as soon as that location gets known about, that village can get swamped. So, but we're working with local authorities, they will control that distribution list if you like, by local community Facebook groups and that kind of stuff. So that's one thing: work on the bottled water stations.

In terms of vulnerability, we're looking at partnerships both in terms of, we'll continue with the data and that's been an ongoing project for about four years trying to get as many customers on the priority services registered as possible. That is the safest thing in terms of protecting, that customer be on that register.

But also, in terms of the delivery checking. So, we've had a number of offers from local authorities who will help with the delivery which is great. We manage the delivery but also helping with the door knocking, because that bit's really important and going back to a property that you've delivered the water, they haven't picked it up off the step, those sort of things, making sure someone knocks on the door, visits them. So those partnerships, we're creating.

And again, I think the trial is with Maidstone in terms of both the support from Maidstone Council in terms of the drop off but also in terms of the temporary bottle water stations as well. So that's, that's two new, three new things that we put on the action plan in terms of vulnerability.

**CCW Chair:** Okay, that's really good to hear but you're going to, are you going to do an all-encompassing review of a strategy towards vulnerable people.

**David Hinton:** Oh no, we're doing a whole incident review on this event, so vulnerability is a key element of that. Clearly. So is alternative water. So is tankering, which we use, etcetera.

**CCW Chair:** Yeah, can I just - because obviously we're pressed for time now, can we just move on to the sort of building the trust back and there are two particular elements to that as far as I could pick up from the discussion.

One is about leadership and how the chief executive is seen and the leaders of the South East Water team are, at the time of an incident. The second is about the regularity and the schedule of updates that customers are receiving.

Can you sort of talk a bit about that and what moving forward, how you plan to handle that in the future?

**David Hinton:** So, we sort of touched on the communication issue. Comms issue is difficult, right. So in terms of who you put up, so there's always a discussion. Because what's really key is that the message we're getting to customers is "This is why your water's off? This is what we're attempting to do" and then in an ideal world "This is when it's going to come back on". So, they're the three messages.

Unfortunately, this is just a sign of the times. I used to be able to do that quite a lot and I did do that at a number of events. When I do it now the questions aren't about the event, so I don't get to say those things. Oh, I do, but they get lost in the edit. So, I've done quite a few and I've talked about that a lot. So, we took the view generally we put people out there, experts in the area so we can get the public message to the public. That's what we're trying to do. And then I tend to then do at the end, when we no longer need to get the public message out because the water's back on and then that's when we talk about all the issues. That's generally been our tactic.

Now we are definitely going to review that. There's definitely lots of opinions whether it should. Who should it be. When. And it's a tough call and all I want to do is make sure that we're telling the customer the right thing at the right time. I'm very happy to be 100% accountable for everything and stand up in front of the team but if it's counter-intuitive, if it's counterproductive in terms of, we don't get the message over.

But if you've got suggestions on, and I hear you and that is a view, I sometimes share that view depending on the incident and I think it's a little bit horses for courses sometimes. But if you've got a view on what we should do in that space, really keen to hear that.

And then the second part, building trust. Building trust is going to be about us delivering, not having any water interruptions anymore. If we do, we handle them really well. We learn lessons, we go out, talk to customers, find out what the issues are, build on that and respond. It's not going to be by having, forgive me, for sessions like this. It's going to be what we do on the back of sessions like this, and it's not going to be about me going on TV a lot, making promises. It's going to be about what we actually end up doing.

So, we've already got a multi-point action plan. It doesn't fix everything. If we've got time, I'm happily talk to you about how I think we've ended up in this position, because

that's a long debate. I think you might find it quite interesting. So effectively you've got this by actions. It's by action doing. And then when someone keeps telling you something and it lands, you start to believe him and understand that if it doesn't land, you don't.

**CCW Chair:** So, I think I'd like to go back to the customers now and see whether you think that discussion has captured what you wanted to see going forward, see the company taking forward.

I think, Community Member 5, you had your-

**Community Member 5:** Yeah, I just had one sort of side question to ask. Sorry. It's kind of going back to the vulnerable again. Are there Internal or External SLAs that you have to meet for that individual who's struggling, let's say, physically or whatever their issue is, then you have to get them water.

Because obviously if they're there and they've got whatever the issue is, they're going to be panicking and they might not know what's going on. So do you have to get water to them in a certain time? And was that met this time, on the point that the water was cut off? Because there are going to be issues when you don't know what's going on. And you have to have a plan for that as well.

**David Hinton:** Maximum is 24 hours in-between delivery. So in the first 24 hours we need to get alternative water to vulnerable customers and we need to make water stations available in 24 hours of loss of water. And then every 24 hours after that, we deliver to the PSR customers.

I think we're in the very, very high 90s in terms of the delivering against that, on the vulnerable customers. I don't like that because that means some customers didn't get it in 24 hours. So, we're always trying to chase down 100%, how we can assure the 100% delivery. So again, I'll go back to my biggest fear which is that we're trying to chase down that 100% delivery

But, yeah, that's, that's the kind of, they feel like that is, that is the maximum, because that's, that's effectively in the regulations that all water companies have got, saying we need to get alternative waters to vulnerable customers within 24 hours and then deliver every 24 hours thereafter. But we obviously try and do it as quick as we can.

We quite often pre-emptively deliver. So if we think we've got an issue like, we can see a burst main and we can see the reservoir that's supplying it is draining and we can think, in three hour's time there's a good chance, if we don't fix it in three hours time, those customers are going to be off, we'll pre-emptively deliver to PSR customers and then they might never lose the water. We do that quite a bit because that means we can get ahead of the PSR customers, make sure they have it in place and then they keep the water. We tend to keep it for a bit.

**Community Member 3:** To be fair, my dad has had water when his water [supply's] actually returned, for a change. And he's not had it when he needs it.

**Rob Crumbie:** [Nodding] But you needed to explain what was going on, yeah-

**CCW Chair:** So, what we're looking for is clear specific actions coming out of what you said. So, as you can see up there, there's a few.

There're the responses down the right hand side that you'll have heard from South East Water from David and Rob. Are these matching your expectations? Are these capturing correctly exactly what you're looking for? Or is there more? Is there something else that we haven't captured?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, I think we're focusing too much on the vulnerable because actually every single person is vulnerable, because we all need water. So, if you're in a queue queuing and then that station shuts and you've not got water, you are then vulnerable. Regardless of whether you've got any disability, you need water. So, it just need- I think it needs a bigger strategy to pump it from somewhere else. Must be a way of doing that.

**Community Member 5:** So, I guess this is kind of what I was saying, like, if there's an SLA for 100% of people to have got water, then you guys have got to understand why that didn't happen this time and how you will do it next time. And action for that.

**CCW Chair:** So, what specifically can you do to address that point?

**David Hinton:** Well, it's the lessons learned on the 'PSR delivery misses' point. So, we would have missed some customers. We know we missed some customers because they told us we missed them.

And when we went back. It won't surprise you to know we're doing a massive investigation in this which is largely being run by people outside of South East Water. It's been effectively sponsored by one of our non-exec directors and that's about as independent as you can get and still be our investigation and the response is a key part of it.

So, every time we failed anywhere. So, 90%, even if it's 99.5%, we failed there. We will look at why we did and can we correct that? Is that an issue that we need to correct?

**CCW Chair:** Okay, yes.

**Community Member 2:** Just one quick thing. So, you identified those customers who didn't receive water. Are they going to be compensated for the loss of water? And if so, I assume you've had a lot of complaints registered as well.

So that building the trust, I'm still a bit unclear of through the complaints process and what lessons learned. How are you going to A, compensate loss of water and B, resolve these complaints to, you know, build the trust effectively?

**David Hinton:** Well, it's about how you respond, isn't it? So, there is compensation if you weren't delivered to as a priority services customer. There's obviously compensation for loss of water, there's compensation for receipt of bottled water and all those elements are being paid, have been paid to some customers.

We're working our way through. We have to do that within the next number of days of the final part of the event, and businesses and households all get compensation. So, you're right. I know every letter gets responded to, including the ones that come to me.

**Community Member 2:** I appreciate that. But until you've just told me now, I wasn't aware that you were compensating loss of water.

**David Hinton:** Yeah.

**Rob Crumbie:** So just to put a number on it, every customer, we looked at the amount of time they were out of water, they do it in 12-hour blocks and all the details are on the website. But I'll just take you through it.

**Community Member 2:** They're on the website.

**Rob Crumbie:** They're on the website. Absolutely. Yeah, we're very transparent with this. It's 12-hour blocks. We paid out nearly £14 million in compensation to the households before Christmas that were impacted and leave £2 million to businesses. So it was, in total, it's about a 16 and a half million-pound compensation payout.

Customers get the choice. They can take it as a credit for future accounts, or they can take it as a refund, and they can have a cash back in their account. And recently we're finding that, I think maybe it's the January thing and people are seeing their credit card bills coming in, but we're starting to see a trend towards cash refunds which we are processing. So that's very transparent.

And where we could, we have ignored [these standards]. And that's a positive ignored. Ignored some of the GSS standards, the guaranteed standards, service standards. So, things like boil water notice were paid to businesses where it didn't have to be. We've ignored some of the 12-hour route times when water might appear restored, so we've been more generous with the compensation I guess this is the point I'm trying to make. But 16 and a half million pounds was paid out from pre-Christmas.

**CCW Chair:** Just a technical point. It's not technically compensation. It's statutory payment in lieu of service. So, it's not a goodwill gesture, it's what you're giving people for the fact you didn't give them the service that you should have done.

Can I just ask, a lot of this is coming back to you reviewing this, you reviewing that. I mean how are you going to, I think it's, you said it was going to be an independent review.

**David Hinton:** Well, it's about as independent as we think we can make it but will still be our review.

**CCW Chair:** So, it's not an independent review.

**Community Member 7:** Why didn't you get an external consultancy from outside?

**David Hinton:** Effectively they're the ones that are the top of the tree on the-

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, but why didn't you get a management consultancy, an external management consultancy to cover?

**David Hinton:** To run the whole thing.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah

**David Hinton:** I mean effectively it's what we've done. So, you know-

**Community Member 7:** But why?

**David Hinton:** But you have to give, someone has to give them direction. Someone has to again talk to these people.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, but people don't need, they pick it up very quickly. I've done inquiries before. They pick it up very, very quickly. So why would you have a non-exec director doing that?

I don't agree with that at all. I think it should be put out to one of the big four and do it like that.

The other thing is you talked about the communication. That needs to be an integrated part of the disaster recovery. So, every part of the business has gone down. Communicate, you know, these are the options, ping, ping, ping. Communicate, you know everything needs to be incredibly forensically detailed for the general public. I think people thrive on detail. People are not scared of detail. Okay.

Don't treat them like fools, you know and don't, I wrote this down. Don't assume, you said you assumed that the water would come on. Never assume anything. You can't make assumptions unless you have facts. You know, I think that's a mistake as well.

**David Hinton:** Well, if you don't know a definite date, you stick with, because this is a really interesting question for us. If you don't know for definite, well-

**Community Member 7:** Then you need to go externally, don't you? If you can't work it out within your own management team.

**David Hinton:** It's not a management expertise thing.

**Community Member 7:** Well then that's what I'm saying. You're just saying it's not a management expertise thing, then you need to go externally to find it, to employ people that do know how to give you the answers to these things.

We're lay people here. Okay. But you need to go externally to management consultants who would have dealt with this before and communication elements and employ them to do that. You're paying 15 million quid out to your customers through lack of service.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So, Community Member 7, just to check, one of the actions would be for an independent review?

Community Member 7: Absolutely, yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: What's everyone else's view on that? Do you have an opinion on it?

Community Member 7: This is a major outage.

Community Member 2: Where's OFCOM in this?

Community Member 3: Yeah, but who's paying for this. Are we all going to be charged for it at the end of the day?

Community Member 7: I'm sure.

Community Member 2: Sorry, where's OFWAT and the co-regulator?

CCW Chair: Well, I don't think. Go on, David.

David Hinton: So, the Drinking Water Inspectorate are doing a review of this particular event, so we shall cover everything because they're also in charge of the GSS compliance. So, the Guarantee [Guarantee Services Scheme, GSS] sends a service, they cover that off and the vulnerability piece. So that's the external independent review.

And OFWAT, they're doing the review as well.

TMcK Facilitator: Just very quickly, Community Member 3, you mentioned something in relation to environmental considerations about plastic bottles. You mentioned your dad's got hundreds of bottles in his room.

Community Member 3: So probably millions. I dread to think how many bottles. What is the environmental impact on that? My view would be that you should be paying fines for that. But obviously at the end of the day, all these things get passed on to the customer, so it's never going to be a good thing.

But I personally think shareholders and sorry, bosses should take a hit on this. It's not fair that the customers are going to have to pay for it all.

TMcK Facilitator: Sorry, is there any practical considerations?

Community Member 3: Ah, bottles. Well, that goes back to what I was saying about having a strategy. Don't have the bottles in the first place. Pump it in, get it tanked in, whatever.

CCW Chair: Or if you are using bottles, can you have a recycling strategy alongside them?

Community Member 3: Yeah, collect them. Yeah. That's a good idea.

Rob Crumbie: I think, we did speak to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and they did agree to take side waste on recycling after the event. So, we did work in collaboration with the council.

Water's a tricky thing, though. It's difficult to carry in anything else but plastic. That's the trouble we've got.

Tankering is an interesting one. It takes the Blackhurst service reservoir, which is at the height of the situation. It takes four hundred and eighty 30,000-litre tanks to fill that up once, and that drains down in a day. So we were, I think we used 36 tankers at the height of the incident, and we were moving water into other areas.

It was, there's a really good video that's been produced on the website, explains our tunnel trailer water system. So, we're moving water in from around and about, but it was the boosted area, so the area up in the high ground. So Frant, Bells Yew Green, little bits of Pembury where we couldn't get the water to that were impacted.

So, there was tankering going on. 36 tankers. That's a lot of tankers. And there was moving water around, but we just couldn't pump it in from anywhere else.

**Community Member 3:** It's a privatisation issue. But maybe the water companies should collaborate together and help each other out, even if you have to pay each other. But they've, obviously everyone's got facilities, they've all got tankers, they've all got water. So, there's plenty of water in country. So, it just, it needs a bit more of a uniform response.

**CCW Chair:** So I'm going to have to draw a line under that because time is sprinting by and we need to move on to the second question. So, can I ask Community Member 1 to ask the second question, please?

**David Hinton:** Should we change person now?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

**David Hinton:** Yeah.

**CCW Chair:** Shall we take the break now?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah, let's go for that.

### *Break*

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah, I can run through [the action from question one]. So, the first one we spoke about was supporting vulnerable customers. Now, obviously, there were many messages sent out, but as Customers you wanted to know, how are you going to be sure. What are you doing to make sure that these reach really vulnerable people, especially those who are maybe not on the PSR? How are you going to reach those who don't have access to the Internet? And how are you going to collaborate with local authorities? It sounds like that's something that's being undertaken currently. What are you going to do to continue to do that? And obviously, what else can you do to help knock on doors and check in with the elderly on a practical level?

With regards to technology, I think all the customers agree that an app could be a useful thing to have when it comes to bottled water station. So that's, that's definitely something to consider going forward.

From an environmental perspective, there was questions around plastic bottles. Obviously, you know, we need to get water out to people, but is it a better way? Can you collaborate with other water providers to get more tankers? What are you doing about recycling when it comes to disposing of those plastic bottles? And why should customers have to travel to collect bottles water? Can it not be pumped into the main more proactively? And also, can more water be delivered to more local locations?

We spoke a lot about building trust and really what's been done to build trust back. How are you going to work on your communication so it's concise, accurate and reliable and believable. There was discussion about there being one voice from leadership being front and centre to help build that trust.

The communication strategy didn't feel like it existed to some customers and as a result, the room was lost. So, what is the communication strategy going forward? It needs to be integrated and forensically detailed.

We spoke about compensation for loss of water and how that's going to look to build trust. And there was discussion about the idea of a truly independent review off the back of all this.

So just with all of those different actions mentioned, does that summarise from a customer's perspective, looking at this list, does that summarise what we discussed? Everyone's nodding their head for the transcript, so....

**Community Member 5:** I think there's going to be something around like just giving us the visibility of the report once it's completed. Whether it met SLA's, how closely it was and what all the actions are in detail so we can all review it.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, so something that a customer can digest at the end of the-

**Community Member 5:** Yeah.

**TMcK Facilitator:** And what's your expectation and timelines for this sort of thing? Do you have any expectations?

**Community Member 7:** Well for this stuff, three months.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Three months, yeah.

**Community Member 7:** It's fair enough, isn't it?

**TMcK Facilitator:** You tell me. It's customer expectations.

**Community Member 6:** Yeah, I think three months.

**Community Member 7:** Three months is good enough. I mean, you tell us [gesturing to David].

Three months, you could do that?

**David Hinton:** Yeah, yeah. Different timelines for different things. Some of them are happening right now.

I think the independent review side is outside of it, or actually, I don't know if it is- No, no, I think that is in the three month window as well.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah.

**CCW Chair:** Okay. I think if you call it an independent review, you need to make sure it's independent. That's all I would say. That's the feedback you're getting.

**David Hinton:** Yeah, yeah, yeah

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay.

**CCW Chair:** I think we need to move on.

**TMcK Facilitator:** We do.

**CCW Chair:** Do you want to read question 2?

**Community Member 1:** Yes. Okay. You gave a detailed account of what happened at Pembury and why it happened. We then heard a different explanation from the Drinking Water Inspector. Why do the two accounts differ? And who can we believe? What learnings from the inspector's feedback are going to be actioned?

**David Hinton:** This is an interesting one. So, this is referring to the EFRA Committee evidence that I gave and then Marcus Rink gave. Okay, the DWI. So forensically going over there, where we were different was only on one thing and that was the foreseeability of this thing happening. That's the difference between the two opinions.

He talked about a lot of other bits and pieces that I didn't talk about just because that's not where the questions went. So it wasn't, there wasn't a conflicting view because I didn't actually express my view. So, the only thing I think this is, is that that's what I was different on.

So, I don't know because I still don't know why Marcus and DWI said it was foreseeable because they, he just said it was foreseeable and he expressed in a couple of sentences why he thought was foreseeable. So, I haven't seen that yet. So, he did say he's going to send me the data. He said it's my data and he'd done different stuff with it and he would come to a different conclusion. So, I can't really comment on how he came to a conclusion that it was foreseeable. All I can tell you is why I thought it wasn't.

Right. So, and to be honest, my stance on this.... it's not just mine. This is obviously from what I've gotten of water quality. I've also got PhD chemists who work for South East Water as well as Marcus's [Rink] PhD chemist. So, I've got people in the business and they're looking at me and just very simply express, 'This is why we thought it wasn't foreseeable', right. So that treatment works has run that way for 20 years. And it's run with 'This is a coagulant. It's the thing that makes the particles stick together so the filtration works better'. It's just a very simple chemical. We use the same one there for the whole 20 years and we've never had this happen. And then when it started to go

wrong, so with water treatment, you continually changing the dose because the raw water is continually changing. So, you adapt. You can see there's some changes, I'm going to add some more chemical, reduce it, add the pH, all that sort of thing you might imagine goes on.

And we did what we normally do, and it didn't behave how it normally behaves. So, we then had to do something we've never had to do at Pembury, which was buying a whole load of new coagulants live, and test them as fast as possible so we could change it and get it to work. So, my simple argument on foreseeability was we couldn't see that as being a likely outcome of the beginning of this event, because it never has been. And we've had to do this process over and over and over again and it's never, and it's always worked except for this occasion. So that's why we think that ultimately that's why we took the view that we couldn't have seen this.

It wouldn't have been a normal step for us to go. Because in hindsight, right, we've now got another coagulant there as an emergency backup, that's different to the one we've got. Having that there, in hindsight, there are things to do, but we would never have imagined, because there was no reason to, that we would need that prior to the Pembury event. We've got loads of other treatment works that just work fine on one coagulant, loads of them. In fact, most industries don't have a spare coagulant sat next to them, with a different coagulant. They run with one. And so that was really the fundamental reason I said it wasn't that foreseeable.

History tells us this hasn't happened before. And so that is, so that's the kind of view, isn't it? Foreseeability isn't a fact, is it? It is a, an opinion.

So the opinion we have was, honestly if I could have seen that as an issue, it's about £20,000 to put an extra piece of coagulant on the site and this event has cost us nearly 30 million. So if I could have foreseen it, I think we would have spent the £20,000 and put it next. We didn't foresee it.

**Community Member 1:** So what was the problem then? Because, I mean, chemical reactions are standard. Chemical reactions do what they're going to do.

Why, in this particular case, if it's been running for 20 years, did that chemical reaction not take place?

**David Hinton:** It's really interesting and it's really tricky. So, you know, when you get... water's made up of loads of things that all waters made up of; alkalinity, carbonate, pH, all that kind of stuff, it's in everything. It's in all water. And the presence of those can affect how the coagulant works.

And on this particular time, five or six of those parameters in that raw water were right at the top end of where they normally are. But at the same time the temperature was cold in the water because it was really low. The Pembury pond was really low. So when it was cold outside, that water got cold. That was one of the lowest temperatures that water's ever been. Because normally it's full up and it buffers itself.

Right, so we are pretty confident, and we've replicated this since, with all those different things happening at the same time and temperature effect meant that coagulant didn't work and that had not happened. All those different chemistry properties of that

water had not happened at Pembury before. Because if it had, we'd have had the same issue.

**Community Member 1:** So why were these five different? I mean, was it a different [measurement] tool? Was this run-off water?

**David Hinton:** It's all springs. It's all springs. It's nearly all springs.

**Community Member 1:** Yeah.

**David Hinton:** So, water naturally comes out through the ground around the Pembury Pond, as we call it, but then runs in and doesn't really pick up anything on this journey. It's coming from the groundwater. And so there's always going to be a variability in that. It's not normally a lot.

Groundwater is normally pretty stable, but there was enough of a variability for that particular effect to take place.

**Community Member 1:** So it was a combination of factors.

**David Hinton:** It always is. Every time we have an event, it always is. It's never one simple thing, it's always a combination.

**Community Member 1:** It just strikes me odd. It's like, so we've got the wrong sort of water. I mean, how, when we've had rain and runoff and whatever for 20 years or probably thousands of years, if it's spring water, that suddenly it changes so much?

I mean, was there something happened somewhere else along the line?

**Douglas Whittfield:** Our treatments aren't built to [inaudible], just to supply to that. Just to really emphasise on what David was saying, we see seasonal trends in the raw water quality at Pembury, because they're spring sources, and depending on the time of year, the spring will be fed more from rainwater, or if it's in the summer, it will be more groundwater.

And what we have seen coming into this event is that those seasonal trends were wider than they normally are and they came together. And also we had, as you'd be aware, we've been in restrictions over the summer because we had, effectively a drought. So that Pembury pond, as David was saying, was much lower.

So normally the pond is relatively full. The water comes in and comes out and the pond stays at that level. It's above that. What happened over the summer was the springs, because it's been very dry, had dropped in volume, so they were obviously drawing it from a slightly different place. The pond level had dropped and then coming into that period, we saw a drop in temperature as well.

So it's almost, those natural seasonal variations were slightly wider this year, and it was a combination of those things.

**CCW Chair:** Can we move on from the more technical stuff now? Because I think there's a second part of the question which is about the learnings.

I mean, have you learned anything from what the DWI have said? Is there anything you can take from it, what you can do differently, what you can do in the future from today?

**David Hinton:** So in the course of the event, so it was like Monday, Tuesday, I was actually at Pembury with the team trying to work out what was going on, because it just wasn't working and they were trying everything. And Douglas and I actually called an industry call.

So we contacted all our colleagues who work in, what we call process science. We got all of the experts in the industry together and there was one guy. I won't say who or where [he is] from, but he went "I have seen this once before". And he explained what was happening to the treatment, that no one else had heard it, including us. And he'd seen it once before and then he went, 'This is what I think it is'. And that helped us. Well, actually, we'd already changed the coagulant, but that helped us go, 'That is it. That's what we need to do'. So it wasn't like we were in a whirl. So now we know this issue.

In fact we've now shared it with the whole industry. So this is quite an unusual issue, and we've now shared it with the whole industry. So they're now 'forewarned is forearmed'. A lot of other companies now know this can happen. So that, and obviously we'd now all go much quicker. It won't be at Pembury if you know about Pembury, but if any other of our treatment works start to behave in this way we will go much quicker to the solution we have, which is to change the coagulant.

Like I said, it's an unusual thing too. But now that's definite learning; to have that backup chemical ready and to switch. And we are going to monitor as well, more closely, the actual raw water quality at Pembury.

So [the Pembury water quality] is relatively stable. [The stability of the water quality] wouldn't have really solved this event, but it's always much better to be able to go, "Okay I can effectively" - again it's the trigger of changing the chemicals. But we do monitor it, and a lot of the stuff goes to the lab. Inevitably, it's a two, three-day test in a laboratory. You can buy online versions of some of the monitors and put them there. It's not common to do this, by the way. Not common in industries to do this. But for somewhere like Pembury we've shown that it can suddenly go, [and it's] not just enough to make treatment works stressed. We're going to add monitors to that, that aren't currently there to that as well.

Anything else I'm missing?

**Douglas Whitfield:** No, I think that's about right.

**CCW Chair:** You're expecting more feedback from the DWI?

**David Hinton:** Yeah, they're doing a full investigation which will probably take them longer than three months. But they will give us, I'm expecting to see, what behind their conclusion was foreseeable. Because we haven't seen that yet.

**CCW Chair:** And would you give a commitment to act proactively on any recommendations that they make?

David Hinton: Always.

CCW Chair: So that commitment is banked then.

Okay, I'd like to move on now to hear from customers about what you've just heard and what you believe needs to follow on from that. So I'm going to hand it over to Nicky to do the moderation.

TMcK Facilitator: Great stuff. Hand up there, jump in.

**Community Member 5:** Just a quick one. You said that it was going to only cost 20,000 pounds to put the same coagulant. So have all the stations that have only got one coagulant now got a second?

David Hinton: Well, they've all got accessibility so yeah, they all have and it's something you might. You can imagine that Pembury would have had one next to it for 20 years and never used it.

So we've got a central storeboard which we can move, move the coagulants to whichever source we want too really quickly.

**Community Member 5:** Prior to any outage for instance?

David Hinton: Oh, yeah. Prior to any outage. I mean, we haven't touched on this yet, but the other company that had this issue. So part of the issue with Pembury is that we had no time to fix this before customers were affected. The supply, demand. If anyone, if any of you watched Douglas's video, I don't think any of you have. But the system is really, really tight between supply and demand.

And I can talk to Community Member 1 or anyone else [who] wants to talk about how we ended up in that position. Very happy to do that after. It's not one of the questions. But we'd got limited amount of time to be able to resolve this issue before the customer impact. So it's really important that we get quick accessibility of that [issue] and we're really conscious the whole time if we're going to be able to fix these things really, really fast, before customers are impacted.

Reservoirs like Blackhurst, the reason they're put in place is they buy you time, from the time your treatment-works might go off for a power cut ..

TMcK Facilitator: So just, just quickly, I'm just going to jump in here.

Just due to time, I think that what you're talking about is of great interest. We're going to have further Accountability Sessions where we can talk about infrastructure and what's been done. But for this particular one, we're going to focus in just on the question itself.

So just to kind of cover off the actions that are in place just now, we've spoke about there being a different coagulant now available for the region as required. You've spoke about monitoring it more closely and I know there's a lot of technical things spoke about. And actually, thank you so much for taking the time to explain all of those.

From a customer perspective, though, I want to try and understand a little bit about the actions that you're expecting off the back of this. So I know you've all taken some notes down and there might be some things we can discuss and then we can maybe revert back and we can respond, if that's okay.

So, Community Member 2, do you want to jump in?

**Community Member 2:** Thanks for explaining. I've had a couple of questions, actually. Is it not better to have a joint statement? So I know there's two accounts. But how did two accounts, how did it arrive at two accounts? Why wasn't there a joint statement, to avoid the confusion?

**TMcK Facilitator:** So Community Member 2, I think that was more to do with the fact there was a parliamentary inquiry about it. And that process took place.

**Community Member 2:** Ahh, okay I got that.

Secondly was, you know, you mentioned that this issue had never happened. Did you say within the UK or within your board?

**David Hinton:** No, when I said I went to the experts, only one of them had said he had heard of the issue before.

**Community Member 2**  
In the whole of the UK?

**David Hinton:** Yeah, well there's only 21 water companies, right. So we talk to each other quite a lot.

So it was, it was us and 15, 16 other people having a conversation, who look after all the other treatment works in the country.

**Community Member 2:** And then globally, has it ever happened?

**David Hinton:** No, don't know about globally, no.

We're going to look at that when we do the investigation. Is this a, is this, is this a known issue globally? It's not known in the UK. That absolutely wasn't. It is now.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Community Member 3, I think-

**Community Member 1:** I'm sorry, this event, this different water levels, this has never happened in the history of water supply in this country before? It literally is-

**David Hinton:** It has, but only one person was aware of it as an issue within the industry. So, it's very, very, very rare and not, and not shared, clearly, because only one person-

**Community Member 1:** So you're saying it's an extraordinary incident.

**David Hinton:** Yeah, that's why I said it wasn't foreseeable. Yeah, because-

**Community Member 1:** No, when you said that, I can see where you're coming from.

**CCW Chair:** Presumably the drinking water inspector had come across it before.

**David Hinton:** Well, I don't know. I haven't seen what they've- how they took their view on foreseeability.

They may have seen [it]. I mean, they're more likely to see than anyone else because they effectively go around every company and talk about the issues that they've had. So, so they're more, much more likely to have seen it.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Can I ask a question to the customers quickly?

When it talks about monitoring it more closely, so looking at whatever test is they do to find out if this water needs this chemical or that chemical, what's the expectation in how often that sort of thing's monitored?

**Community Member 6:** Can it not be daily, like. Yeah, I think at least daily, like.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, I don't know, maybe-

**Community Member 6:** More regular than that.

**Community Member 3:** Surely it must be constant. Have a dipstick in the water, till it gives you feedback.

**Community Member 2:** I'd like to think hourly.

**Community Member 6:** Yeah.

**Douglas Whitfield:** Well, we've got, [inaudible] said we've got a whole set of online monitors, which we call them for key parameters through.

**CCW Chair:** That's continuous?

**Douglas Whitfield:** They're continuously monitoring. That's for a certain set of key parameters. And it would be like pH and chlorine, and turbidity and things like that. But we don't have online monitors. This is what David was saying for every single parameter there could be-

So we have some online monitors and then we have a whole other suite of samples which we take on a daily or weekly basis which get analysed at the laboratory. So they're sort of grab samples at the centre, right. And what we're doing on the back of this is increasing the variation of online monitors that we have at Pembury. So we have a fairly standard suite across the industry and across South East. That's what's at Pembury.

We will be looking at some additional ones that we don't have at many other treatment works on the back of this instance.

**CCW Chair:** Can I just be clear? Are you only doing the extra tests for Pembury or are you doing it for all of your-?

**Douglas Whitfield:** At the moment we're focusing on Pembury because we've had this unusual set of circumstances there, and also which monitors you put on depend on what type of treatment process you have. So the monitors we put on at Pembury might not be applicable to our other treatment works, but yeah, that's, we're focusing on Pembury at the moment.

**Community Member 7:** And what are the timescales around that?

**Douglas Whitfield:** I couldn't give you an exact time as of yet, but I would say months. certainly not years. But we've got to work out exactly which ones we'll order, where we'll put them and then order them and install them. So, yeah, over the next few months.

**David Hinton:** And connect them up, that's a big thing. So we've got complete visibility. If Douglas had his laptop, he can tell you what the pH currently is at Pembury. We've got complete visibility of everything. We've got 83 treatment works, all with about average, about 20, 30 sensors or something.

**Douglas Whitfield:** Hundreds of alarms on every treatment work which go back to our central control room, which we're looking at.

**TMcK Facilitator:** And in a few months there's going to be more coming online and that's the action work.

**CCW Chair:** Can I just ask the customers whether they believe that the company has complete visibility, based on what you've seen and heard?

**Community Member 3:** Yeah, I'm not quite sure whether the foreseeability issue- Are they talking about the issue that the foreseen coagulant might fail or are they saying you should have foreseen that there might be an issue, in which case you should have had a proper strategy and mismanaged the situation and had a plan in place because that will, you know, that's worst case scenario.

But it has happened. It could be worse. It could be the whole area. Then what are you going to do. But you should have a strategy as a business to deal with that.

**Community Member 7:** I think especially, especially as this has been seen- What date was this last? What, what date did it last occur in the UK? This, this chap that you spoke to.

**David Hinton:** Well, he didn't give me an event. He said, he said, 'I've seen this happen once before'.

**Community Member 7:** Okay.

**David Hinton:** And then he explained what happened which matched exactly what happen to us.

**Community Member 7:** But in your, you know, you've made a lot of excuses about water supply and everything. You've talked about global warming. You've talked about all your various ducks lining up, which has made it difficult to manage water.

Okay, so, you know, we'll give you global warming, okay? So then you need to look at, what are the risks surrounding global warming, okay? And you need to build up a task force that's going to work on these scenarios that can occur with regards to that, all right?

And you've got to look, you know, your reach has got to be a great deal bigger than just your own area. You've got to be all the, all the boards have got to be sharing information so that these things are front and centre. And you know, that when water levels are getting low, X, Y and Z potentially can happen. You know, that seems like an obvious thing to do to me, to actually, as you said, risk manage this. Risk management means looking at all the scenarios.

**Community Member 3:** And the worst case, really. You should have a strategy, if it doesn't happen.

**Community Member 7:** I think so. I really do think so in this day and age. You know what I mean? So I think that's something that's very important.

**TMcK Facilitator:** I think based on what's been said, I'm wondering is there one monitor test that, if you had it in place and did it at a certain time, you'd have picked up on the issue before it happened?

**David Hinton:** Combination of different ones. It's not one single thing, okay? It's not one single thing.

**CCW Chair:** And nobody in the UK is monitoring for those things?

**David Hinton:** They might be. Look the thing-

**CCW Chair:** They must know about them then.

**David Hinton:** So how water quality works in the UK, [for] monitoring. This is not [just] South East water. You look at the raw water you've got, what risk it poses. So a river, for example, has everything in it, right? So you have a full set of monitoring and you have a load of treatment.

On the South Downs, we take it from deep chalk. Deep, deep chalk, about 200 meters down. You could drink it straight out of the ground, no problem, much less monitoring. So, because that's proportionate to the risk that raw water takes-

The way Pembury have been run forever is we didn't need to monitor those parameters on the risk basis, they were relatively stable. It didn't affect the treatment. They hadn't done for 20 years. On a risk basis we were doing the right monitoring for that particular water type.

Now this has happened. It doesn't mean we'll then go to the chalk, for example, and just cover it with sensors, because we know that that's not going to happen. It's got to be proportionate and that's how, that's how effectively the drinking water, that's how the DWI regulate drinking water in the UK.

Your risk has got to be proportionate to your raw water, your treatment's got to be proportional to your raw water risk.

**Community Member 7:** But the playing field, you know, everything's moving, isn't it, with global warming? It is moving.

So you guys need to be adapting, you need to be not behind the curve, which seems to be where you guys are. You know, you need to be pre-empting these scenarios.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So, as an action then, to look at all the areas at risk to things like global warming.

**Community Member 7:** And it doesn't have to be South East. This should be for all the water companies, shouldn't it, really.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Well we're focusing on South East. I think as an action-

**Community Member 7:** I know, but there's a cost implication for this business. I think that's something that they could promote within the wider industry as well. Because I would have thought these guys, you know, you're going to suffer more drought in this area than probably Yorkshire and certainly the Scottish ones, aren't you?

So you're going to be at the front of the- that's, that's your USP as far as this is concerned, to try, try and push that forward within the whole industry. I think that makes a lot of sense.

**Community Member 5:** It's proactivity versus reactivity.

**Community Member 7:** Absolutely.

**Community Member 5:** And you're stuck in the reactive.

**Community Member 7:** We're always going to be in this position, aren't we?

**Community Member 5:** But that would also rebuild trust.

**Douglas Whitfield:** On that point, on that point-

**CCW Chair:** Very quick one.

**Douglas Whitfield:** We work in a five-year plan. I won't go too much into it. In our five - year plan we put in double the investment we ever had and with a large focus on resilience in this period. Because I completely agree with your point. And when we got our determination from OFWAT, we felt that didn't give us enough, particularly in the resilience piece.

So that's one of the main drivers. We went to the CMA (Competition & Markets Authority) to appeal that, which we're still in the process of. So I do agree with you and that is absolutely what we're trying to do to enable us to get ahead. Because what we have seen in the last five years is these impacts of climate change, and whether it's the drains and [inaudible], have happened much more quickly than we-

**TMcK Facilitator:** I think as part of this, it's important we don't focus on price control because I think that's another, that's another accountability session. We can look at what that looks like.

**David Hinton:** Sometimes these questions are hard for us to effectively interact with, without context.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah.

**David Hinton:** So forgive us but we'd have to add context otherwise we're not giving the customers effectively the full picture and the context is really important.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So I think from relation to price control, there is a bigger question around investment and around how that gets divided up amongst the water companies. But I think for this particular session we're looking at actions that can be taken in the short term. We can talk about longer-term as well, but we're looking for little things that can change that would potentially prevent.

**Community Member 2:** I mean, it talks about risk assessments there. So are you carrying out a risk assessment review on all of your sites or are you just solely focusing on Pembury at the moment?

**David Hinton:** Pembury's a bit different.

**Community Member 2:** Yeah, I appreciate it's different. All the other sites-

**David Hinton:** Your points stuck together is a really valid point. So, does water quality change significantly with climate change? Right.

So that is a big industry question. It's a big industry question. Most cases, no. And when it does, it's not always in the expected way. So it's not always like this is entirely predictable, that water will do this in climate change. Because I'll give you a really quick example. It rains roughly about as much as it used to, but it comes down in really short bursts now. And this is a proven part of climate change. It's going to get more extreme.

What that does is run off more into the river than we had before, because intense rain runs off into the rivers much quicker than [sound effect] just so you end up with really, really dirty rivers. So they're finding they're really, really dirty. That's one of the issues we had in post-Christmas is the River Ouse just went untreatable. After, fields in the local area were just washed into it, it was like it was [inaudible].

So that point around, as I'm trying to help you with the action [point], I think, is have you looked at all your raw water sites and seen you've got climate change scenarios? We have got them. But review, I would say, review your climate change scenario against the water quality risks posed by climate change. It's something like that.

**CCW Chair:** I'm going to ask Nicky to summarise the actions that we've developed and see if we've got them in about the right area, whether you think that we've hit the nail on the head or whether we've missed the point.

So, Nicky, do you want to go through them?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yeah. So I think one of the actions was around how there's two different accounts and from a customer perspective, so who's right, who's wrong and why is there different stories coming out?

And I think one of the actions is, you know, what do you believe you should have foreseen before this? And obviously we're going to be looking at the response from the inspector on that, so you can understand what they're looking at versus what you were looking at.

And obviously there was a coagulant issue. So you've stated that as an action, you've now got second coagulant available as required across site, which is something that the customers are obviously looking at, as an improvement.

What learnings from inspector feedback are actually going to be actioned. And I think you mentioned all of them.

And then when it comes to the additional monitoring, you've obviously mentioned that there is additional monitoring in-place. And I think the customers want to understand in layman's terms, what does that look like? Why have you chosen to do it in certain areas and what will that therefore mean going forward? So I think something around that would be really useful for people.

And then obviously the commitments around the recommendations, we've covered that off you've said you're going to do that. And then, is there a task force that can deal with these issues on an individual basis? What are you doing to adapt to future risks, both proactive and reactive?

And I think you mentioned there with regards to the sort of climate impact that's going to be happening in specific regions, I think potentially an action from that is to see that you are identifying regions at risk and obviously putting an action plan in place to deal with that.

So I think that that potentially would cover- Does that sound a fair summation of what we've discussed? Is there anything else that you want to add in as an extra.

**Douglas Whitfield:** Just one really quick point on the risk assessments you were talking about. It's an ongoing process. Just to make you aware that this happens on a monthly basis. So from all our water quality data, the whole industry adopts an approach called a 'drinking water safety plan' approach, which is about identifying your risks to water quality, the catchment, the treatment, all the way through on a regular basis and updating that.

So those laboratory samples that we're taking each day and each week, we look at those and we look at the trends of those and each month we submit an updated risk assessment into regulators on whether we're seeing anything improving or decreasing and whether we need to do anything about that.

So don't worry that we're not doing that. That's a regular process. What we're talking about at Pembury is a sort of exception on the back of this incident as well. So there is a regular ongoing review of the risk assessments plan with all our treatment works.

**CCW Chair:** So I'm going to draw a line under it there. We've got 20 odd minutes left for the final question, so we might need to focus quite succinctly on this.

So I've got Community Member 7 for the third question.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, thanks guys.

What are you doing now to identify, to identify and prevent another Pembury style outage, particularly in the areas with a single water source or other unique vulnerabilities. Given that household demand has increased since COVID 19 and climate change and population growth are putting even greater pressure on water supplies.

**CCW Chair:** So again, you've got five minutes.

**David Hinton:** Five minutes. So I'm gonna have to do the context piece.

So South East Water in the area, we've got lots of little tiny treatment works. Eighty-three. And in a way that's quite nice, right, because they're all community based. So Tunbridge Wells has got four effectively. Well, only one that does 90% of water, but it's got four. And we've got lots of areas that historically, that's how it happened historically, happened that way because we've got chalk underneath us and so everyone could draw their own borehole and get water out, create a water company. So that's effectively what happened and they all got stuck together. So you'd never design it like South East Water. Up North they haven't got chalk. They built big, huge treatment works, you know, so ours is tiny. So the configuration is not great, right, in the south-east.

And the other thing that's happened is we've had continuous housing growth, right, and it's eroded. When it was built, when everything was built in orchards, it was built massive. The sewers in London were built massive. Everything was built massive. And what we've seen is that extra that we've had, that surface has been eroded over time by just housing growth. And now we've had population growth with that climate change.

We've had all this kind of- And we have been trying as a business to restore that buffer, more supply in. And there is no mechanism. You're going to say, I'm making this up, but I will talk to you very happily after. There is no mechanism to easily restore that buffer within the regulatory framework.

I would love to do it. My company is about building water assets, and my shareholders are about supplying water. There's a massive incentive on shareholders to invest. Everyone always thinks that there's an absolute incentive on shareholders not to invest, but it's the opposite. So we want to build stuff. We have been banging our head up against a brick wall and trying to get this, that extra piece put in. We are still fighting the regulator.

You know Bewl Water? So Bewl Water's got one of our treatment works next to it. We've been trying to get the funding to expand that. If we had that, we could have [inaudible] Tunbridge Wells with Pembury off. If we'd have had that, we could have no issues. But the regulator says we don't really need it. It's a qualitative assessment by the regulator. We want standards, so standards where 16,000 customers should not be reliant on a single source. Blackhurst should have at least 36 hours storage in it. It's only got 24, and it's 100% full. So that's an extra day that we could have had.

So that's what we are trying to do. And we've effectively, we have been given £200 million on resilience, which is great, but it's not what we want. We need the extra bit. We are trying to catch up for about three decades of not having this money. We are struggling to serve you guys with assets. It's not the assets themselves. There, it will be working. It's not enough of them.

So one thing that gets in the press quite a lot is our assets are aged and they're falling over. We've got about 2% outage at any one particular time. So about 2% of the water we could create has not been created. The rest of it's been- So Pembury went off. That's part of our outage, but it wasn't an asset issue. It's a chemical issue, but our assets are running all the time. There's just simply not enough of it and we're desperately trying to get the investment to move it up.

We're looking at single source, to answer the question, looking at single source places like Tunbridge Wells and we're trying to get water from an area where we actually have got a bit of extra light fuel, and move it over. We've got other different systems that we can put a bit of water into Tunbridge Wells. We're just trying to connect it up. We're trying to add storage in, which buys us time for when the treatment works falls over and we've got time to fix it and customers are not affected and we're trying to put more water into the system.

That's the three simple things that we've been trying to do and we've been trying to do those since about 2022. And 2024, 25 is our big opportunity in the business plan and we have got it.

Really, unfortunately, we could have done with the last business plan being five years earlier because the schemes we've got in place now would have stopped all this happening. But everything accelerated and we've been struggling in the regulations to get it funded and that's why we-

So it's a really long [story], I know we're going to get into price reviews but we've appealed to the Competition and Markets Authority. We've never ever done that before. That's a big deal for a company to appeal, that's effectively taking a teacher to the head teacher. We've appealed the regulations to get that one because we didn't get enough resilience. If you read our CMA appeal, it pretty much says, line number one, we're doing this to get extra resilience in Sussex and Kent. That's why we're doing it. So we are connecting stuff up. We've got a resilience plan which we can share. We've got schemes individually that are solving individual resilience issues. And the big one for this area is the Bewl expansion and the associated mains to move it over.

We've got bits like that all over our area that we are, that we've got funding for most of it and we've started it. Got some really quick schemes that we are bringing in, which gives a little bit more, because that's what we've been concentrating on in the five-year

period is doing, maximizing the current system, connecting bits up. We overspent last five years by £100 million on our thing. So we've been doing this extra stuff.

**CCW Chair:** We've had slightly more than five minutes. So I think we need to move back to the customers and get any reaction, any thoughts that you've got about anything that you've just heard.

**Community Member 3:** Okay, so why are the water boards not questioning the government about their building policy?

**David Hinton:** We are.

**Community Member 3:** Oh okay, because it seems a bit farcical.

**David Hinton:** Some of the bits of regulation in the UK are slightly crazy. We are not a Statutory Consultee in Development. So no one has, if you're a household development, you can just connect to the network and we have to supply it.

So that's that, we are statutory consultees on businesses, on business development. So you want to build a massive great IKEA. We get asked. We get asked a question about whether it's doable. We can actually say 'no' to that but not housing development.

**Community Member 3:** It's a different board. But where I live there was a care home being built and the water board were specifically asked that question.

**David Hinton:** Technically a care home is a business.

**Community Member 3:** Oh right, is that why you can ask. Okay.

**David Hinton:** And also you can ask them. But ultimately if the company says 'No, you can't do it', they can still connect to it.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Just quickly. I think it'd be good to understand from you guys what the areas are at risk.

So the single source areas, what are you doing just now to make sure that another Pembury style thing doesn't actually happen, outside of getting loads of extra money and all these plans that would be very sensible here.

**Community Member 7:** So what's here for the 'there and now' really. That's the whole concern.

**David Hinton:** Yeah. So Tunbridge Wells now, I don't know, Douglas is best to answer this. He knows the system so well.

**Douglas Whitfield:** So we're looking at it in two or three different areas. So if you're talking about short term, next 6-12 months, let's say. So there's some things that we need to learn off the back of this incident from the operational team. So we need to do slightly differently. We're just going to start doing those.

We're going to significantly change the way we deal with- on the back of the last few years anyway we've been doing this, but on having boxed spares for things that fail, as David said, I'm running at the moment at 3% outage across Kent and I consider that quite high, and unfortunately what I can guarantee is that at some point in the summer a pump is going to fail, a motor is going to blow up, I don't know where or when. And what I'm going to have to do this year is have significantly more boxed spares if you like, at the sites that are single source supply or with areas with lack of headroom, which is this surplus that David was talking about. That's one thing.

The other thing is replacing some kit. That's fairly short-term to replace. And then the final stream is me liaising with the asset management and investments team, making sure that I'm happy with the prioritisation of the longer-term infrastructure bits.

But it's those 1, 2 and 3 really. That's the operational practice. I can change box spares to be able to replace something quickly that goes. And upgrading small amounts of kit.

**David Hinton:** Well, we've got this. We've also got, we've also got, at the moment we've got two actual operational interventions.

So this is a really long story. We definitely won't be able to get this out now. But we've got a source of water that we also use to support Tunbridge Wells which we've had to turn off because it's got contaminated by a piece of development. So we've had to stop that. We've put an extra treatment in.

**Community Member 1:** Contaminated by what, sorry?

**David Hinton:** By building works. So it's disrupted the, because it's all groundwater, disrupted all the groundwater. We've had to turn the source off while we put treatment in to solve that issue. And then we can transfer water from Bewl to Pembury area. And we do.

We can't transfer as much as we could just because of a few hydraulic issues that we found out actually, just prior to the November event. So we're changing that so we can put a bit more. This isn't a game changer like a bigger Bewl is, but this certainly helps fill up Blackhurst.

So there's that as well. So they're like literally they're four, five weeks, those two projects.

**Douglas Whitfield:** Yeah. One of them just helps us guarantee the water out of Pembury a bit more. Should be about if we ever have any problems with Pembury again. And the other one, as David said, would allow us to transfer a bit more in across from your-

**Community Member 7:** So they're not big groundworks, they're literally just different direction-ing.

**Douglas Whitfield:** They are engineering projects but they're not long large engineering projects. Weeks rather than months, hopefully.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, that's good. But are there, I mean this is, again you're behind the curve and you know, down to your budgets probably, but you still- Are there other things that you need to do?

And I guess this is in the five-year plan.

**Douglas Whitfield:** What we're trying to do is show up as much as we can with the assets we've got and , as I say the long-term way to get that buffer, the headroom back, is the un-destruction bits we were talking about.

**CCW Chair:** You can spend more than OFWAT asks you, of course, so. And you probably have in the past, at various points.

**David Hinton:** We spent £100 million more the last five-year period.

**CCW Chair:** So in answer to your question, it's not just the question of what they can raise through OFWAT. They can spend more on things that are necessary, should they wish to.

**Community Member 7:** And what do you do? How do you raise the funds? Through your shareholders.

**David Hinton:** That's effectively shareholder returns.

**Community Member 7:** Do you have the support from shareholders at the moment?

**David Hinton:** My shareholders are really good. So they are long term pension fund type shareholders. They've been in for ages. I've never ever been encouraged to underspend my budget and they supported me overspending my budget by £100 million.

But the model, if you can just overspend all the time just doesn't work, because if you invest in an industry you just get no return over time.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Any other thoughts in the room? **Community Member 2**, do you want to jump in?

**Community Member 2:** It's very encouraging that you are challenging your regulator and please continue to do so. I know how, I work in local government. I know they can be quite, projects and tasks...

You mentioned your business plan. So you said in your own words, you said it's not in that business plan. So have you reviewed your current business plan? If not, when is the next review? And are you able to review your business plan in light of what's happened?

**David Hinton:** What did I say wasn't in the business plan?

**Community Member 2:** I can't remember. But there was something... you said you can't do it in the five years. It wasn't in the plan.

**David Hinton:** But just on the question of, so the business plan is a five-year thing. So it actually takes about two and a half years to create.

**Community Member 2:** So how far in your business plan are you now, after this incident?

**David Hinton:** So we're in the 2025-2030 period. Okay, so we're right... we're at the beginning. So we've just effectively got the £200 million I was talking about for resilience. We've started those projects.

**Community Member 2:** Well, you haven't changed your business plan, with that funding.

**David Hinton:** No, no, that does change. Our business plan is actually. So think of a business plan as like a bid for funding. So our business plan had that £200 million, £300 million in. They gave us £200 million. So we're doing £200 million worth of the £300 million. We're trying to get the extra hundred million for the CMA. So we've got massive resilience projects to do.

**Community Member 2:** Within?

**David Hinton:** Within a five year period. 2025 – 2030.

**Community Member 2:** So you've got another five years.

**David Hinton:** No, hang on, it won't all be done at the end.

**Community Member 2:** What are the lessons learnt? Why don't you adapt your business plan?

**David Hinton:** We're prioritising the areas that are most vulnerable. So the Bewl one is pretty much top of the list. And then we're working our way through, through other ones. It's all, you know, it's all about the supply chain deliverability, but what's always our focus and you know, hopefully you're getting this from me, I'm absolutely set with trying to get resilience in because it stops the interruption.

So the focus of the capital program is do the ones that have, that make the risk significantly less for customers to have an interruption.

**Community Member 2:** So you've accelerated those?

**David Hinton:** Yeah, absolutely. Accelerate those. Do them in the right order.

**Community Member 5:** What's the timescales for those being delivered? The first ones.

**David Hinton:** Well, some of the first ones will come up very, very quickly and be smaller. You can't build anything quick in the UK, you know, particularly pipelines. So pipelines go across numerous landowners, numerous planning agents. Some of them can take like 12 years. We haven't got anything [that is] going to take that long you'll be happy [to hear]. But they're not quick unfortunately. And, and to be fair to the current

government, they are looking at ways... because they realize that water infrastructure has been underfunded for ages and needs to catch up really fast.

It's not just South East Water. Everyone's investment profile doubled. It's ridiculous. It doubled. But anyway it doubled and so there's lots of delivery going on and the government are really trying to speed that up. So they are trying to reduce some of the planning rules around some of this stuff.

Inside the fence is easy as we call it, the treatment works, it's easier. But particularly tricky is when you have to go across multiple landowners.

**Community Member 2:** Time scales then. Do you have time scales?

**David Hinton:** Yeah, time scales on all of our schemes. Yeah.

**Community Member 2:** Okay.

**David Hinton:** There's lots of them, there's lots of-

**Community Member 2:** Are you sharing them with customers or is it just with board members?

**David Hinton:** Well they're in the business plan. So everything [is there]. Yeah, we've got to adapt that with what we've got [from] funding. It's not the same number. But our big schemes are in the business plan.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So no one here is going to read the business plan, okay. But is there an appetite for specific communications about, you know, the company coming out and saying, "Well here's what's happening in Pembury and actually here's a short bite sized thing of what we're doing about it". Is that something-

**Community Member 7:** I've got an idea for these guys. We talked about communication. Grab Fiona Irving and do a half an hour television program about it on Southeast News. A special. You know you've taken a lot of S H I T haven't you? I mean a lot of -

**David Hinton:** I know Fiona quite well because of it.

**Community Member 7:** Okay.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, but what about doing something like that.

**David Hinton:** I think you're right. We're not at that point in the curve at the moment though, are we?

**Community Member 7:** No, but to just lay out the plan, start the trust. Do you know what I mean?

**David Hinton:** I'm absolutely with you.

**Community Member 7:** Yeah.

Community Member 3: Are you transparent on which other reservoirs have got issues?

Community Member 7: Yeah.

Community Member 3: I'll be interested to know if where I live is vulnerable.

David Hinton: For instance, Eastbourne -

Community Member 3: Yeah. Is that the same? Because weirdly I wasn't out [of water], whereas the town was.

David Hinton: Where do you stay?

Community Member 3: Sovereign Harbor. So we had low pressure.

David Hinton: You come from that lovely, lovely chalk block though. That's where your water comes from.

Community Member 3: Oh right okay. So that's where I'm safe.

CCW Chair: Where do you publish the risks that currently customers could see. You know where these risks are?

David Hinton: We don't publish that geographically. I mean it's -

CCW Chair: How does, if I'm a customer here, how do they find out where there might be risks?

Community Member 2: I'd like to think there's a risk map.

CCW Chair: But do you publish. Yes. Do you publish a risk map?

David Hinton: No.

Community Member 3: And you've got one, presumably on your risk management strategy.

Douglas Whitfield: Yeah.

Community Member 2: That red, orange, green. I'm in the green -

Community Member 5: The dates showing.

Community Member 3: I did tell my dad he shouldn't buy here.

Douglas Whitfield: The investment plan that we've done is a regional plan and it'll be done in regions. When we then took it to stakeholders and councils last year we were showing snapshots of the plan, showing this is the investment coming in your area and the proposed time that it was going to happen. So we can, we can, we can show you

for your area what specific schemes are coming over the next five years and when we plan to do them.

When they actually deliver, obviously we've got to be a part of it. But as the business plan was submitted we said "This is what we're planning to do in this area, under the next five years". Literally down to scheme names.

**Community Member 2:** I think anything's better than the usual price-increase communication we receive.

**Community Member 3:** Also it stops a lot of speculations. Obviously a lot of people are not, maybe not from Tunbridge Wells, but they're all panicking. "Oh gosh, the infrastructure's gone" around the whole country.

**David Hinton:** See, I'm worried for some people that it's difficult to quantify, because we might say 'This is risky', but what's risky? One person's risky is not another persons risky.

**Community Member 3:** Not having any water. That's a massive dissuasion, yeah.

**David Hinton:** Well, exactly. So that's become pretty evident, doesn't it?

**Community Member 3:** So no pressure!

**David Hinton:** If you'd taken Tunbridge Wells prior to the Pembury event, I would have put it as Amber. It's got a tight supply-demand boundary, went through the really hot summer, didn't have any issues at all. Not a problem at all.

And the reason that this isn't about the second event, but the reason that Tunbridge Wells was affected so badly in the second event is we were still in the first event effectively. We were desperately trying to fill up Blackhurst, but so slowly because we did not want to interrupt anyone over Christmas. We did it really, really slowly. We didn't know there was going to be a freeze thaw, so our reservoir would be about 30% when the freeze thaw hit. We just couldn't believe it.

So we were trying to be really careful with the fill and then a freeze thaw happened. So Tunbridge Wells is more vulnerable because it's got a very tight supply-demand balance. So we could talk about which, what would be the most comfortable way I think for customers to receive it actually; about understanding whether there's a tight supply. I'm just thinking on the hoof. Anyway, that's not -

**TMcK Facilitator:** I think certainly from what I've heard there is an appetite for information around "Will this happen again"? Why has it happened and what are you doing about it? And water is like any utility, when it works, you don't care about it. It's just a thing that you expect to come through and it's not something you're going to ever look up information on really. That's what I typically hear from customers. "If it works, why am I going to read a business plan?". "Why am I going to look at resilience?". Same with energy, gas, you name it.

We're in a situation now where we speak about trust and how to rebuild it. And what we're hearing is that we want to know right now what's actually happening, what is being done to improve the outlook both in terms of the current resilience, future

resilience. So I think there's a different communication action to be taken from this, for those that are interested in it. And I think there's a challenge for you guys, as water companies, to decide how to communicate that in a way that people are going to interact with. And that's always a million dollar question.

So I guess my final question to the group is, "When it comes to communicating all these valuable pieces of information, how are you going to interact?". "How would you want to interact with it?".

**Community Member 4:** Social media. It's not just for the old and horrible. We're young, we've all got a phone. Don't see anything from you guys.

**David Hinton:** No. Social media is definitely a learning for us, about how to do social media.

You know, cards on the table. One thing that sort of slightly frightened us when we started the event. So when we started the event we were being transparent about... we were pretty confident there was a chemical issue with the coagulant, right. That then grew massive legs on social media in a direction we didn't anticipate.

You might go, "That's naivety!". It probably is naivety from our point of view, but it grew massive chemical contamination legs, which is not what we wanted to be out there at all, because it wasn't a contamination thing at all. It's just treatment wasn't working very well.

So [learning] how to use social media and be transparent is definitely a learning for us, because it just does its own thing, doesn't it? Sometimes [it] just goes sideways and we go, "Crikey, I never thought that particular thing wouldn't go that way".

**CCW Chair:** Can I just say, David, if people trust you, they will believe you.

**David Hinton:** That's true.

**CCW Chair:** And the issue that companies like South East Water have, as your customer said earlier, is there's a lack of trust. So when something goes wrong, they think the worst rather than think the best.

**Community Member 7:** Yep, I agree with that.

**CCW Chair:** So I think an element of transparency, sharing the risks that you're facing would, I think that's what customers are asking for, a bit of openness and a bit of honesty. It would go a long way to rebuilding the relationships that have been injured, I would say.

**Community Member 7:** But you need a reset with the public, don't you? I don't know what that looks like, but that's for you to decide. But you do need a reset.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay. Just to sort of go through the actions we've spoken around for this question. You know, obviously we want to know what actions you're taking now to identify and prevent another Pembury style outage, particularly in areas with single

source water or other unique vulnerabilities. And obviously there's money there from the resilience fund that you're looking at.

You're prioritising areas that are most vulnerable. I think there's an appetite for understanding in a bit more detail what that looks like. Obviously you're doing some smaller works to try and connect things up a little bit. Again, you know, it's trying to work out what does that look like with any action plan that we create so that we can see that and what the next steps will be.

Obviously you know areas of single source water, the short term learning that you've spoken around is making sure you've got these box spares on site so that if something does go wrong, whether it's a motor, you just don't know what it's going to be, whatever it is, you've got something there. And again, I think the customers are keen to understand what that looks like.

Obviously there's an option for you to spend more than OFWAT limits. So again, is that something you can talk about, to show the areas where you're going above and beyond and when you do that, what the reasons for that might be.

Then we spoke a little bit about communication. As mentioned, this is a really hot topic right now, particularly for people within the Tunbridge Wells area and generally across most water regions. They've picked up on this story and there's questions that have been asked. So how are you going to communicate things to customers or suggestion of doing a sort of in-depth news article when the time is right? Talk about bite sized plans, social media work that could potentially help to rebuild trust.

Is there a risk management map that would be palatable for customers, that you can share? What might that look like?

And again, there is an appetite for why this has happened and what's been done to fix it. So now is the time to get communication out there to try and help people understand it and take them on that journey.

I think that those actions are certainly the things we're looking to see in the action plan. And I know we've been going for two hours now folks. So we're just finishing up. Based on these things, is that something that covers this question? Is there anything else we want to add?

**Community Member 7:** Maybe sponsor something in Tunbridge Wells over the summer? Just an idea.

**David Hinton:** I would love to see that, but with other customers going, "What do you spend on pumps?".

**Community Member 7:** Yeah, I think so. It doesn't have to be expensive, does it? But you know what I mean, it can be just a -

**TMcK Facilitator:** That can maybe be something out-with the OFWAT limit.

**Community Member 7:** Just, again it's part of, you know, kids or something like that.

CCW Chair: Community building.

Community Member 7: I think there's a point where you do need to start -

Community Member 1: I think, if you did what this gentleman's suggested, held some kind of interview, however long with one of the TV channels, presumably one you've mentioned, because what you've explained to me tonight is completely different to the understanding that I've had of the situation.

David Hinton: That's the frustration I have. A lot.

Community Member 7: Yeah, you don't get long enough. If you've got half an hour then you could spell it out to people.

Community Member 1: You're just getting sound bites and headlines. So yes, if you were given quarter of an hour, 20 minutes, what have you, and I'm sure a South East special on something as tense as South East Water.

David Hinton: I'm on a lot of news at the moment, wasn't I?

Community Member 1: Yes you are. And I hate to be rude but when I saw you on telly last week you didn't come across that well. And speaking to you now individually and you explaining, I can see how the, you know, coagulant, blah, blah, blah and I appreciate the problem.

And it would dispel, hopefully, a lot of the misinformation that, I mean I don't use social media but I would imagine it clogs up with rubbish quite quickly.

David Hinton: Just has anyone seen Douglas's video on the...

Community Member 1: Sorry?

David Hinton: Did anyone see Douglas's video where he explained the Pembury system works.

CCW Chair: Did he share it on social media?

David Hinton: Oh no, we're probably not going to -

Douglas Whitfield: I think they did actually. It's on our website as well at the moment. It's a five minute video.

Community Member 2: Nobody's checking your website, I think.

David Hinton: No, we 'socialised' it to the website.

Community Member 2: If you did a video on the TV, everyone will be sharing your video.

David Hinton: It'll just be the Water companies seeing it.

Community Member 2: But they'll share it. You'll be surprised, you'll be viral!

David Hinton: Thank you.

CCW Chair: I think it's time to wrap up really. So I think from a CCW point of view it's been really helpful this evening listening to all your views. I think we've learned a lot about the process because this is a new process.

I said at the start, I think we'll go away and we'll reflect on how we can improve on some of the things we did tonight and you know, maybe getting some of the timings a bit different and so forth. I hope that all the customers who came along have found it interesting and useful. You've certainly made your point on a number of areas and I think that's been heard loudly and clearly, obviously.

Thank you to South East Water for coming and listening to customer concerns.



The voice for water consumers  
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