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# Water Voice - Accountability Session

## Summary report

**Water company:** Portsmouth Water

**Accountability Session date:** 02.03.26

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie  
Research & Energy Saving Trust

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# Questions created and asked by community members



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- Community members identified three priority questions they wanted to put directly to Portsmouth Water during the Accountability Session.
- The questions were developed through a structured process involving the full Water Voice community (c.50 members). In January and February 2026, members collectively identified and refined priority themes through Spotlight surveys. These priorities were then shaped into draft questions during a dedicated briefing session, before being finalised and formally put to Portsmouth Water at the Accountability Session.
- Each question was led by a community member and explored in depth during the session. Portsmouth Water provided on-the-record responses, with commitments and actions discussed in real time.

	Topic	Community member question
Q1	<b>Value for money:</b> Transparency & executive accountability	<i>“Can you <b>clearly show</b> how customers’ bills are allocated, how increases are tied to measurable performance commitments, how executive rewards reflect those outcomes, and how customers can easily track progress each year?”</i>
Q2	<b>Drinking water:</b> Quality, taste & pressure	<i>“What will you do to <b>address taste, hardness and pressure concerns</b>, and when will customers receive <b>automatic postcode-level alerts</b> about local issues - including <b>clear trigger thresholds</b> for when those alerts are sent?”</i>
Q3	<b>Proactive leak detection</b> & bill shock prevention	<i>“Your systems already detect significant and sustained changes in household consumption, what specific policy or operational reason prevents you from contacting customers at the point the anomaly is first detected rather than wait for bills to escalate? <b>Please explain the thresholds you use, the processes for triggering customer contact and why the intervention is set so long after a financial impact applies.</b> Is it fair to place the burden of proof in the customer, and will you commit to more proactive alerts?”</i>

The sections that follow set out each question in turn, alongside the actions discussed and the expectations community members have for delivery through the company’s published action plan. This will be published on **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2026**.

# Executive summary - insights by question



The Accountability Session for Portsmouth Water highlighted a clear need for greater transparency and trust in how money is spent, clearer real-time communication on water quality and pressure, and earlier, automated intervention to prevent leaks and bill shock.

## Q1.

### Value for money: Transparency and executive accountability

Portsmouth Water outlined a regulated pricing structure, performance-linked bonuses and publicly available reporting.

Community members accepted the framework but called for the information to be presented in a clearer, simpler and more accessible way.

Existing information must be clearly signposted and proactively communicated, not buried in lengthy reports.

## Q2.

### Drinking water: Quality, taste & pressure

Portsmouth Water explained the natural characteristics of its water supply and current pressure controls and committed to expanding digital postcode-level alerts.

However, customers called for clearer explanations of pressure levels, more accessible water quality information, defined alert thresholds, and more visible, real-time communication of local issues.

Transparency on pressure levels and automatic local alerts will determine confidence in drinking water quality.

## Q3.

### Proactive leak detection and bill shock prevention

Portsmouth Water explained that leak detection is strongest where smart meters are installed, that consumption monitoring is in place across district meter areas, and that 10,000 smart meters have already helped identify leaks. The company committed to installing smart meters for all customers within seven years and to developing best practice around automated alerts.

However, customers questioned the seven-year timescale, the delay between anomaly detection and contact, and the fairness of requiring customers to provide proof before support is provided.

Earlier alerts and clearer thresholds are essential to preventing bill shock and building trust in leak detection systems.

# Actions agreed during the Accountability Session



## Q1.

**Value for money:** Transparency and executive accountability

- Produce a simple, accessible Annual Summary
- Make performance information easy to find
- Provide a transparent visual breakdown of spending
- Clearly explain and evidence executive reward links to performance

## Q2.

**Drinking water:** Quality, taste & pressure

- Help us understand why pressure is at the current levels
- Provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of current water quality and why it is as it is.
- Send automatic postcode-level alerts with clear trigger thresholds. Ensure all customer contact details are up to date and explain why the water company holding this information is important
- Explore treating water hardness at source

## Q3.

**Proactive leak detection and bill shock prevention**

- Contact customers earlier when abnormal usage is first detected and clearly explain how leak alerts are triggered.
- Remove the burden of proof from customers when reporting leak incidents
- Enable customers to request smart meter installation without delay
- Provide practical advice and financial support to prevent leak-related bill shock



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## Summary report

# Our findings in detail

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# Q1. Value for money: Transparency & executive accountability

Clarity, transparency and trust in how customer money is spent



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Question asked by Portsmouth Community member:

*“Can you **clearly show** how customers’ bills are allocated, how increases are tied to measurable performance commitments, how executive rewards reflect those outcomes, and how customers can easily track progress each year?”*

Portsmouth Water outlined a regulated pricing structure, performance-linked bonuses and publicly available reporting.

Community members accepted the framework but called for the information to be presented in a **clearer, simpler** and **more accessible** way.

## Actions

- Produce a simple, accessible annual summary
- Make performance information easy to find
- Provide a transparent visual breakdown of spending
- Clearly explain and evidence executive reward links to performance

*“I think it just helps to build trust and understanding... when you see the information in black and white, then we can then make an informed decision about that”*

*Community member with Metered bill, Suburban, 55-64 Working full time*

*“Obviously, like someone’s already said, the current, yearly report is a 90-page document. They need to condense the bits that the customers are actually asking for.”*

*Community member with Unmetered bill, Urban, 35-44, Working full time*



Existing information must be clearly signposted and proactively communicated, not buried in lengthy reports.

# Q1. Value for money: Transparency & executive accountability



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"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Portsmouth Response on the night)	What is the 'Ideal' Portsmouth response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale / Final comments
Produce a simple, accessible annual summary	Information on performance and commitments is available in the annual report Performance commitments form part of the agreed 5-year business plan <b>No future commitments were stated</b>	Create a 1-page, plain-English, easy-read summary of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key performance metrics</li> <li>• Progress made</li> <li>• Where customer money is spent</li> <li>• To accompany customer bills.</li> </ul>	<b>Timescale:</b> Within a year / quarterly document if possible accompanying bills
Make performance information easy to find	They agree with the regulator what total revenue can be collected Bills are structured in line with that agreed framework Performance commitments are set out within the 5-year plan <b>No future commitments were stated</b>	Clearly signpost where detailed information can be found <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include direct links or QR codes</li> <li>• Avoid burying key metrics in lengthy annual reports</li> </ul>	<b>Portsmouth Water final comment:</b> No issues, action points are fair.
Provide a transparent visual breakdown of spending	Bill allocation is agreed with the regulator Charges are balanced across the customer base Bills are based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured consumption (meter customers)</li> <li>• Estimated usage (non-meter customers)</li> <li>• Revenue is capped by the regulator and redistributed fairly</li> </ul> <b>No future commitments were stated</b>	Include a clear visual (e.g. pie chart) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show % breakdown of spending (service investment vs executive rewards, etc.)</li> <li>• Clearly set out executive reward breakdown</li> </ul>	
Clearly explain and evidence executive reward links to performance	Bonuses are tied to company performance against the 5-year plan Increases are based on measurable performance improvements (e.g. leak reduction) Performance-related pay reflects delivery against agreed commitments <b>No future commitments were stated</b>	Explain how executive rewards are calculated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show how they are directly tied to measurable performance</li> <li>• Demonstrate the improvements achieved as a result</li> </ul>	

**Note:** This table is an excerpt from the full Action Plan. Portsmouth Water will provide formal responses to each action within 28 days of the session date. The updated plan will then be shared with participating community members for review and agreement.

## Q2. Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure

Customers want clearer, real-time communication on water quality, pressure and local disruptions.



Question asked by Portsmouth Community member:

*“What will you do to **address taste, hardness and pressure concerns**, and when will customers receive **automatic postcode-level alerts** about local issues - including **clear trigger thresholds** for when those alerts are sent?”*

Portsmouth Water explained the natural characteristics of its water supply and current pressure controls, and committed to expanding digital postcode-level alerts.

However, customers called for **clearer explanations of pressure levels**, more accessible water quality information, **defined alert thresholds**, and more visible, **real-time communication of local issues**.

### Actions

- Help us understand why pressure is at the current levels
- Provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of current water quality and why it is as it is.
- Send automatic postcode-level alerts with clear trigger thresholds. Ensure all customer contact details are up to date and explain why this information is important
- Explore treating water hardness at source

*“Banks are able to send instant fraud alerts... why can't Portsmouth Water do the same?”*

*Community member with Metered bill, Urban, 75+ Retired*

*“I would like to know what the trigger thresholds are... if there's a pressure drop... locally, postcode-wise... chlorine spike, for example. I mean, there must be set levels.”*

*Community member with Metered bill, Suburban, 55-64 Working full time*



Transparency on pressure levels and automatic local alerts will determine confidence in drinking water quality.



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## Q2. Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure

"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Portsmouth Response on the night)	"We will do in the future" (Portsmouth Response on the night)	What is the 'Ideal' Portsmouth response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale / Final comments
Clarify why pressure is at the current levels.	Pressures are carefully controlled using control valves. Some pressure variation is inherent within the system. Customers are encouraged to contact Portsmouth Water regarding specific pressure concerns.	Increase automation of postcode-level alerts via digital channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help us understand why pressure levels are set and explain if pressure is down to Portsmouth Water not wanting to risk system reliability.</li> <li>• Publish defined trigger thresholds for alerts</li> <li>• Provide localised reporting when pressure falls below expected standards</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Within 3 months</p> <p><b>Portsmouth Water final comment:</b> Addressing hardness at source is complex – requires agreement with health authority. Feasibility questionable.</p> <p>Pressure issues are somewhat innate in the system – Portsmouth welcomes contact re specific pressure issues.</p>
Provide clear, easy-to-understand explanations of current water quality and why it is as it is.	Water is naturally filtered via limestone aquifers, requiring light disinfection treatment. A residual chlorination remains within the water as it travels to point of use.	Expand digital communication channels (email, phone, website, social media). Increase automation of alerts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish simple summaries explaining treatment and taste</li> <li>• Communicate key water quality indicators in layman's terms</li> <li>• Provide timely updates where quality changes occur</li> </ul>	
Send automatic postcode-level alerts with clear trigger thresholds. Ensure all customer contact details are up to date and explain why this information is important	Postcodes are the fundamental unit by which alerts are issued. Confirmed alerts are postcode-based.	Increase use of digital communications for postcode alerts. Introduce new digital billing system (Octopus-based platform).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully automated postcode alerts</li> <li>• Clear explanation of what triggers an alert</li> <li>• Direct links to live issue updates</li> <li>• Better live reporting / instant notifications for supply disruption, hosepipe bans or quality issues</li> <li>• Proactively request updated contact details</li> <li>• Clearly explain why contact information is needed</li> <li>• Provide reassurance on data use</li> </ul>	
Explore treating water hardness at the source.	Confirmed water is naturally hard. Described hard water as "better for you" (with regards to the minerals found in hard water vs soft water) Acknowledged impact on appliances. No action proposed.	No future commitments were stated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparently assess feasibility of treating hardness at source</li> <li>• Clearly explain regulatory or health authority constraints</li> <li>• Provide realistic position on what is achievable</li> </ul>	

**Note:** This table is an excerpt from the full Action Plan. Portsmouth Water will provide formal responses to each action within 28 days of the session date. The updated plan will then be shared with participating community members for review and agreement.

## Q3. Proactive Leak detection and bill shock prevention

Customers want earlier intervention, automated alerts and reduced burden of proof when leaks occur.



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Question asked by Portsmouth Community member:

*“Your systems already detect significant and sustained changes in household consumption, what specific policy or operational reason prevents you from contacting customers at the point the anomaly is first detected rather than wait for bills to escalate? Please explain the thresholds you use, the processes for triggering customer contact and why the intervention is set so long after a financial impact applies. Is it fair to place the burden of proof in the customer, and will you commit to more proactive alerts?”*

Portsmouth Water explained that leak detection is strongest where smart meters are installed, that consumption monitoring is in place across district meter areas, and that 10,000 smart meters have already helped identify leaks. The company committed to installing smart meters for all customers within seven years and to developing best practice around automated alerts.

However, customers **questioned the seven-year timescale**, the delay between anomaly detection and contact, and the fairness of requiring customers to provide proof before support is provided.

### Actions

- Contact customers earlier when abnormal usage is first detected and clearly explain how leak alerts are triggered.
- Remove the burden of proof from customers when reporting leak incidents
- Enable customers to request smart meter installation without delay
- Provide practical advice and financial support to prevent leak-related bill shock

*“I was quite surprised to hear from Bob that only 40% of people have a meter, so I think there could be a big drive to try and get more people to use smart meters, because it's just going to help them, and it's going to help us.”*

*Community member with Metered bill, Urban, 65-74 Retired*

*“If everyone's obviously not using a smart meter, and bills are based on the average consumption stuff... if they say everyone actually uses a lot less water, is that just going to drive the bills up higher?”*

*Community member with Metered bill, Suburban, 25-34 Working full time*



Earlier alerts and clearer thresholds are essential to preventing bill shock and building trust in leak detection systems.



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## Q3. Proactive leak detection and bill shock prevention

"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Portsmouth Response on the night)	"We will do in the future" (Portsmouth Response on the night)	What is the 'ideal' Portsmouth response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale / Final comments
Contact customers earlier when abnormal usage is first detected and clearly explain how leak alerts are triggered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leak detection is possible where smart meters are installed</li> <li>Smart meters are read hourly</li> <li>Customers are contacted when leaks are identified</li> <li>10,000 smart meters installed so far</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install smart meters for all customers within 7 years</li> <li>Develop best practice on when and how to automate alerts</li> </ul>	<p>Publish clear trigger thresholds for abnormal usage Automate early alerts wherever possible Explain clearly why some leaks are not detected immediately Move from reactive billing corrections to proactive prevention</p>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Automated alerts, financial support for bill shock should be addressed within 3 months. Full rollout of smart meters, 7 years or sooner.</p>
Remove the burden of proof from customers in leak incidents.	Acknowledge smart metering will improve detection Recognise current limitations in identifying smaller leaks	Explore how smart metering can reduce need for customer evidence Review alert and support processes	Do not require photo evidence before offering support Assume customer honesty unless clear misuse is evident Provide immediate reassurance and bill protection while investigating	<p><b>Portsmouth Water closed by</b> reinforcing that smart metering is central to protecting future water supplies and responding to climate pressures. They indicated a willingness to explore accelerating the rollout, subject to regulatory approval, and encouraged customers to adopt meters, highlighting both cost and environmental benefits.</p>
Accelerate and explain smart meter rollout and allow customers to request installation without delay.	Universal smart metering programme launched (£60m investment) Target to reach all customers within 7 years	Continue phased rollout across the region	Provide option for customers to opt in immediately Clearly communicate benefits (leak detection, control, fairness) Address myths and concerns around billing impacts e.g. clarify if bills are more likely to increase than decrease because of smart meters	
Put financial protections and practical support in place to prevent leak-related bill shock.	Confirm customers are contacted when leaks are identified Explained how monitoring works	Develop clearer alert processes Consider improvements to support mechanisms	Guarantee bill caps or temporary protection when leaks occur Offer clear payment plans without penalty Provide simple, practical water-saving advice that is realistic and accessible Ensure customers are not financially penalised for hidden underground leaks	

**Note:** This table is an excerpt from the full Action Plan. Portsmouth Water will provide formal responses to each action within 28 days of the session date. The updated plan will then be shared with participating community members for review and agreement.

# What happens after the Accountability Session?

After the accountability session, there is a clear and structured follow-up process.



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## Publication and transparency

**Within 5 working days**

A full (anonymised) transcript of the session was [published](#) on **Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March**



## Action plan

**Within 28 days**

The water company must share its **action plan**, setting out how it will deliver the agreed actions.

The action plan will be **shared with the Water Voice community on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April**



## Customer feedback

Participants will be asked, via a short survey, whether they feel the action plan:

- ✓ Reflects what was agreed in the session
- ✓ Goes far enough to address customer concerns

This feedback forms part of CCW's ongoing monitoring and follow-up with the company and helps inform future accountability work.

**Within 10 working days**

A plain-English summary is published, setting out:

The questions asked.

The key points raised by Community members.

The actions agreed for inclusion in the action plan.

Anything recorded as *not yet agreed*.

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March**



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# Water Voice - Accountability Session

## Summary report

# Annex - Research approach

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie  
Research & Energy Saving Trust

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# Background



## What is an Accountability Session?

An Accountability Session is a formal, facilitated meeting where **water consumers directly question senior executives from their water company** about performance, service failures and issues of concern – and **agree the actions they want the company to take**.

They sit at the heart of CCW's statutory role to strengthen consumer voice and ensure companies respond transparently and meaningfully.

## Why do they exist?

Accountability Sessions exist because customers deserve a real say in how their water company performs. They give people a direct line to the people in charge – not through a survey, not through a complaint form, but face-to-face.

For years, customers have felt that water companies weren't listening closely enough. *Water (Special Measures) Act 20258\** requiring a relevant undertaker to have arrangements in place for involving consumers in decisions of the undertaker that are likely to have a material impact on consumer matters.

These sessions make that happen. They create a space where customers can:

- Ask honest questions
- Raise the issues that really affect them
- Agree the actions they expect the company to take next.

It's all about making the process fair, open, and focused on what matters most to the people who actually use and pay for the service.

\*<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/5/enacted>

# Objectives

What the session aims to achieve



## 1. Give customers a real voice

These sessions make sure customers aren't just "heard" – their views actually guide the conversation and shape what happens next.

## 2. Make companies answer directly to the people they serve

Senior water company leaders must respond openly, honestly, and in real time. No hiding behind reports or press statements.

## 3. Agree clear actions that lead to real improvements

By the end of each session, everyone should be clear on:

- ✓ what the company will do
- ✓ how they'll do it
- ✓ how customers will know things have improved.

## 4. Build trust through transparency

Everything is published – the questions, the answers, the agreed actions – so customers can see what's happening and whether companies are following through.

## 5. Make sure all types of customers are represented

People from different backgrounds, ages, abilities and regions take part, ensuring the outcomes reflect real experiences across the community.

## Outputs

By the close of the process, this Accountability Session will have:

- Provided CCW with **robust, publishable evidence** of consumer concerns and company responses.
- Established a clear and transparent set of customer-agreed actions that the water company must reflect in its published action plan. The action plan itself is published by the company following the session, in line with the accountability process.
- Given consumers confidence that their participation leads to **real scrutiny and follow-through**, reinforcing the credibility of the accountability process.
- Informed future regulatory engagement by highlighting **systemic or recurring issues** requiring wider attention.

Together, this ensures the session delivers both **immediate accountability** and **longer-term value** for consumers and the sector.

# Methodology

How does it work?

CCW

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01



## Prioritising what matters most

### 1. We listen to what customers tell us each month

Through Barometer & Spotlight surveys and the online community

### 2. We play back what they said

In the January Spotlight survey, we show customers the issues they raised & ask them to prioritise the most important ones.

### 3. Confirm their priorities

In the February Spotlight survey, customers confirm if they agree with which points matter most.

02



## Getting ready (Briefing session)

Selected 12 customers join a 2-hour online (via Zoom) briefing before the main meeting.

Everyone gets clear, easy-to-read information beforehand so they feel confident and prepared.

The facilitator talks them through:

- How the session will work
- The issues they've prioritised
- How to shape their questions & come up with a set of questions for each priority.

**We will brief the CCW Chair separately at this point** & remind them on their role, share guide & prioritised topics / Priorities will be sent the Water Companies at this point

03



## The Accountability Session (Main meeting)

12 customers take part in an online session (via Zoom) with a senior water company representative for 2 hours.

TMcK facilitator & Chair guiding the conversation:

- Customers ask their prepared questions
- Challenge the company's answers
- Explore what needs to change.

Live polls let everyone share honest views – even those who prefer not to speak out loud.

Welsh panels will be given the option of English, Welsh or simultaneous translation .

04



## Agreeing what should happen next

During the main accountability session, after each issue is discussed, the facilitator checks whether customers feel the company's proposed actions are good enough.

Together, they work towards a clear **consensus** on what actions the company must take.

05



## Publishing the outcomes & following up

A summary is produced showing: the questions asked, how the company responded, and the actions agreed.

- CCW publishes a **transcript within 5 working days**
- CCW publishes a **summary within 10 working days**
- The company must publish its **action plan by day 28**

Panellists are asked short follow-up questions about whether the plan reflects what was agreed.

CCW then tracks progress and updates panellists before the next session.

[Priorities will be shared with the ISG]

# Sample

Who takes part in an Accountability Session



We've brought together a **small, representative group of around 12 people** for each accountability session.

This number keeps the conversation manageable and ensures everyone has the chance to speak.

Each person is selected by the panel manager from their panel of 50 participants.

Our panel managers are responsible for selecting a representative range of participants and ensure that anyone who has expressed a keen interest in taking part in an accountability session is included at this stage.

We make sure each session of 12 includes the following types of panellists:

- **Age** - younger adults, middle-aged adults and older customers (2 per age bracket)
- **Gender** - a balanced mix (at least 5 males & 5 females)
- **Income levels** - including low-income households (3 financially vulnerable, 3 x 20-40k, 3 x £40k-60k & 2 x £60k+)
- **Location** - Rural and Urban water users (different house-types represented)
- **Ethnic backgrounds** - reflecting the local population, 2-3 from an ethnic minority background
- **People with accessibility, neurodivergent or additional support needs** (at least 1)
- **Different customer types** - e.g metered/unmetered, renters/homeowners
- **Different attitudes** – including 3 x positive, 3 x neutral & 3 x negative customers
- **Bathing water users** – 3 regular users (for WaSC panels)
- **Welsh speakers** – at least 2 Welsh speakers within our two Welsh panels & options for accountability session language

*This ensures all voices are represented, not just the loudest or most confident.*

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Thank you!



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