



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Water Voice - Accountability Session

Action plan response

Water company: Portsmouth Water
Monday 13th April

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie
Research & Energy Saving Trust

Version: Update with Portsmouth Water Action plan response –
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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	Value for money: Transparency and executive accountability	<i>“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?”</i>
Q2	Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure	<i>“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?”</i>
Q3	Proactive leak detection and 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? 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?”</i>

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 and 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



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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 and 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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Water Voice - Accountability Session

Action plan response

Our findings in detail

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie
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Q1. Value for money: Transparency and 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 and 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 No future commitments were stated	Create a 1-page, plain-English, easy-read summary of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key performance metrics • Progress made • Where customer money is spent • To accompany customer bills. 	Timescale: 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 No future commitments were stated	Clearly signpost where detailed information can be found <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include direct links or QR codes • Avoid burying key metrics in lengthy annual reports 	Portsmouth Water final comment: 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"> • Measured consumption (meter customers) • Estimated usage (non-meter customers) • Revenue is capped by the regulator and redistributed fairly No future commitments were stated	Include a clear visual (e.g. pie chart) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show % breakdown of spending (service investment vs executive rewards, etc.) • Clearly set out executive reward breakdown 	
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 No future commitments were stated	Explain how executive rewards are calculated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how they are directly tied to measurable performance • Demonstrate the improvements achieved as a result 	

Q1. Value for money: Transparency and executive accountability

Clarity, transparency and trust in how customer money is spent (Q1. Actions A, B, C & D combined)



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Please find the response from Portsmouth Water’s Action Plan below (Page 1 of 2)	Timescale
<p>Key Performance Metrics - We will be implementing a full refresh and relaunch of our company website and this will include an easy to understand, customer facing area related to our Key Performance metrics and will be updated annually.</p> <p>A summary easy to understand version of our commitments and our performance against these commitments is already available on our website at https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/PW_OFWAT-Delivery-Plan-12.08.25.pdf</p> <p>Additionally, we do include an insert including company information with our bills, which is refreshed annually, that explains how and why bills are going up, though it is likely that at the time of the Consumer Panel and Accountability Session members would not have yet received their bills. (A copy of our 2025-26 bill insert which goes with both paper and digital bills is in the annex for reference).</p> <p>We will continue to review how we can use our customer channels to promote access to these summaries following publication of our agreed performance for 2025-2026.</p> <p>In 2026 we will be implementing a full refresh and relaunch of our company website and this will include an easy to understand, customer facing area related to our Key Performance Indicators publishing our full financial year performance. This will make the information more accessible for all our customers compared to PDFs.</p> <p>We will look at how we can use our customer channels to promote access to these summaries following publication of our agreed performance in August 2026.</p> <p>* The response continues onto the next slide</p>	<p>We will relaunch our company website by December 2026 where easy to read summaries of performance will be integrated into the website rather than pdf versions as we currently create.</p> <p>Following our agreed performance reporting by August 2026 we will undertake promotion of available performance information through digital and non-digital channels.</p> <p>We will continue to tell customers about our performance progress on our investment plan</p> <p>We will continue to provide our planned, designed and customer tested summary with all unmetered and bills, whether digital or non-digital. The panel's comments will be used to support our future design for the next bill cycle starting with unmetered bills in February 2027</p>

Q1. Value for money: Transparency and executive accountability

Clarity, transparency and trust in how customer money is spent (Q1. Actions A, B, C & D combined)



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Please find the response from Portsmouth Water's Action Plan below (Page 2 of 2)

Timescale

Where customer money is spent - This has already been included in the summary document provided in the bills response, as described below.

To accompany customer bills - We have already published for all unmetered and metered bills a summary document that explains how money is spent for all customers - this is included to customer whether digital or paper bills. Customers receiving unmetered bills over the period February and March and metered bills between April and September, will have already received these either in digital or printed format.

The bill insert is the one communication channel, we have, that goes to all our customers, so this year we have expanded it to a 4 page insert in order to maximise this opportunity to communicate with our customers. This year we have used it to:

- Be very clear and honest about how bills are changing and why
- Keep customers informed about the things that matter to them e.g. leaks
- Inform customers about smart metering before we start the main roll out of our metering programme
- Encourage signing up to an online account
- Signpost additional support

The content of the bill insert was based on our customer research on what matters to customers where they told us that (leaks, smart metering and how we're protecting the environment were the most important aspects. This was designed following focus groups held in January 2026 on brand and communications messaging.

This link <https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/customer-services/our-charges> takes customers to how money is spent on the website.

We will relaunch our company website by December 2026 where easy to read summaries of performance will be integrated into the website rather than pdf versions as we currently create.

Following our agreed performance reporting by August 2026 we will undertake promotion of available performance information through digital and non-digital channels.

We will continue to tell customers about our performance progress on our investment plan

We will continue to provide our planned, designed and customer tested summary with all unmetered and bills, whether digital or non-digital. The panel's comments will be used to support our future design for the next bill cycle starting with unmetered bills in February 2027

Q2. Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure

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



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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"> • Help us understand why pressure levels are set and explain if pressure is down to Portsmouth Water not wanting to risk system reliability. • Publish defined trigger thresholds for alerts • Provide localised reporting when pressure falls below expected standards 	<p>Timescale: Within 3 months</p> <p>Portsmouth Water final comment: 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"> • Publish simple summaries explaining treatment and taste • Communicate key water quality indicators in layman's terms • Provide timely updates where quality changes occur 	
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"> • Fully automated postcode alerts • Clear explanation of what triggers an alert • Direct links to live issue updates • Better live reporting / instant notifications for supply disruption, hosepipe bans or quality issues • Proactively request updated contact details • Clearly explain why contact information is needed • Provide reassurance on data use 	
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"> • Transparently assess feasibility of treating hardness at source • Clearly explain regulatory or health authority constraints • Provide realistic position on what is achievable 	



Q2. Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure

Customers want clearer, real-time communication on water quality, pressure and local disruptions (Q2. A, B, C, D & E Combined)

Please find the response from Portsmouth Water’s Action Plan below (Page 2 of 2)	Timescale
<p>We will look to include more information and content around network pressure within our new website launch.</p> <p>As part of our publication of trigger events linking to communications we will work with customers through our customer research panels and wider stakeholders to better understand what customers want to know about pressure and when. This will help us to define the right triggers.</p> <p>As part of our communication triggers, we will publish the point when this results in an incident although this is more likely to be a result of a burst or large leak which is likely to result in communications to customers.</p> <p>We are in the process of reviewing our customer-facing leaflets and printed collateral for our summer community events series. As part of this we will look to produce customer friendly literature that explains water treatment and taste. We will also publish these on our website. We will also look to produce 'myth busting' social media content on key water quality issues and promote this across our social media channels.</p> <p>Additionally, we will review how we explain water quality and identify any improvements as to how best we provide that information on our new launched website.</p> <p>The level of chlorine in our high-quality drinking water does not fluctuate very often, and we have to use relatively low-levels compared to the industry as a whole. We do not expect the chlorine taste levels to change dramatically and so if any customer is experiencing this, we encourage customers to contact us. In the future launch of our website, we will ensure that we enhance our water quality section to ensure that we can provide as much information as we are able including any necessary information relating to water quality events. If an abnormal water quality incident was to occur which was outside of tolerances, then this would be covered by our incident response communications.</p> <p>* The response continues onto the next slide</p>	<p>By September 2026 we will undertake review and development of customer printed collateral and social media content to explain key water quality issues, such as treatment and taste.</p> <p>By December 2026 we will undertake review and any necessary customer research of how we best communicate water quality through our website and to our customers generally. Research with our customers will be completed and reviewed by September 2026.</p> <p>By December 2026 we will provide the Consumer Panel with an explanation of what triggers an alert and any identified planned changes.</p> <p>We will continue to promote to customers the benefits of registration to our digital channels to help customers understand the benefits of providing data.</p>

Q2. Drinking water: Quality, taste and pressure

Customers want clearer, real-time communication on water quality, pressure and local disruptions (Q2. A, B, C, D & E Combined)



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Please find the response from Portsmouth Water's Action Plan below (Page 2 of 2)

Timescale

We currently communicate with customers in relation to incidents and outages and this will depend on the circumstances.

By September 2026 we will undertake review and development of customer printed collateral and social media content to explain key water quality issues, such as treatment and taste.

We will consider and use research to better understand when it needs to provide automated alerts for incidents and outages and to which customers. We will provide to the Consumer Panel a clear view of what triggers these alerts will be and when.

By December 2026 we will undertake review and any necessary customer research of how we best communicate water quality through our website and to our customers generally.

We have been working to improve our customer's digital contact details and phone numbers for many years since we launched our first digital portal. In the last 3 years the intensity of this has increased as we launched our new customer systems providing increased self serve opportunities for customers and enhanced communication channels. We will continue to promote registration to digital channels and how this provides access to better communications.

Research with our customers will be completed and reviewed by September 2026.

How we use data is explained in our [Privacy Policy](#) and we will continue to clearly signpost to this in all digital communications channels.

By December 2026 we will provide the Consumer Panel with an explanation of what triggers an alert and any identified planned changes.

During the session, the company outlined that any treatment of hardness at source undertaken in the UK was directly linked to legislative requirement at specific geographic sources. The company would not support the assessment of the feasibility of this process due to:

We will continue to promote to customers the benefits of registration to our digital channels to help customers understand the benefits of providing data.

- (1) The extremely high cost of investment across the whole region that would be required
 - (2) The high ongoing operating costs that would need to be funded
 - (3) Ofwat has never considered this to be a priority or been supportive of any schemes
 - (4) Customers do not support or have the willingness to pay the increased impact on their bills
- Any additional work into this aspect would we believe be a poor use of customer money.

As part of the session the company was asked for its views on Fluoride, and it explained that this was a Health Authority decision and not a decision of the company.

Our realistic position was as stated in the session that the quality of the water (through many chalk sources), whilst creating high quality water, always will be harder water than in other parts of the UK.

Q3. Proactive Leak detection and bill shock prevention

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



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"> Leak detection is possible where smart meters are installed Smart meters are read hourly Customers are contacted when leaks are identified 10,000 smart meters installed so far 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install smart meters for all customers within 7 years Develop best practice on when and how to automate alerts 	<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>Timescale: 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>Portsmouth Water closed by 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	

Q3. Proactive Leak detection and bill shock prevention

Customers want earlier intervention, automated alerts and reduced burden of proof when leaks occur (Q3. A, B, C, D combined)



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Please find the response from Portsmouth Water's Action Plan below (Page 1 of 3)

Timescale

We have been working with our early smart water meter customers, and the wider industry who use smart water meters already, to ensure that we've developed best practice trigger thresholds:

- (1) That alert customers to high usage. Using external occupancy data, we can identify higher than normal consumption data. Where customers have opted for digital communications, we start this journey after 90 days of consumption to ensure we have a strong pattern of usage.
- (2) that alert customers to potential leaks on their property (customer side of the meter). We have in built validation to try and identify 'false' alarms caught by unusual usage behaviour (filling swimming pools etc)
- (3) Usage increases compared to normal patterns. This helps us to warn customers where their usage (whilst within tolerances and therefore not a leak) may create a bill impact for them. It helps us to ensure awareness and ensures the customer can adjust any payment plans they have in place with us or adapt their behaviours to reduce usage.

Once the potential problem is identified automatically, where we hold customer contact details, we are able to issue automatic emails to alert customers to the problem. We have alongside this developed a Demand Management team that will immediately try to contact customers by phone or personal email where the customers have large leaks, offering support and advice to resolve the issue which includes explain about our free leak detection service to help identify where the leak may be if hidden. WE also offer a one-hour leak detection service for free.

We have been asked to explain why some leaks are not detected immediately. This is an area where smart water meters provide a solution to enable us to identify them. If customers have an analogue meter, then it will be read every six months by our meter readers. Our system does identify higher consumption outside of tolerances and we will attempt to contact customers to support identifying whether it is genuine usage or a leak. These are much harder to identify as there is no visibility of usage like we have with smart water meters (having one hour usage visibility). With smart water meters, we can easily identify leaks and then it will be the customer's choice as to whether they choose to fix the leak or leave it. We may have to continue to engage with those customers choosing not to fix leaks on their property which may include serving legal notices to avoid wastage.

We offer customer contributions towards fixing leaks on the supply pipe they are responsible for (a contribution to repair and to replacement) as well as an allowance for water that has leaked where the repair is undertaken within a reasonable timescale. This removes bill impact by ensuring the customer pays no more than their usual bill. When the customer is vulnerable, where we are able to, we will try and fix the leak for those customers to support them, as well as working directly with Social Housing Providers etc.

* The response continues onto the next slide

We will continue to issue automated alerts to our smart water meter customers as well as personal contact and engagement through our focused team. Our Head of Demand Management will review the impacts that the process is delivering annually.

By November 2026 we will review the effectiveness and opportunities to improve our analogue meter high usage processes through our customer focused Continuous Improvement activities.

Q3. Proactive Leak detection and bill shock prevention

Customers want earlier intervention, automated alerts and reduced burden of proof when leaks occur (Q3. A, B, C, D combined)



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Please find the response from Portsmouth Water's Action Plan below (Page 2 of 3)

Timescale

We will review our leak allowance process to identify any areas of friction for our customers relating to evidence required.

Where the customer does not yet have a smart meter, we will always work with the customer to establish the level of water loss (by sending a meter reader to check usage) or accepting customer meter readings to support the customers leakage allowance claim.

Whilst investigating leaks our customers are always protected and we would not seek to force a customer to pay any higher value until confirmed they are liable for the total value. For customers who are aware of a leak and not fixing the leak they will remain liable however and so we will seek to work with that customer to increase any payment arrangements we have in place.

The company already has a meter optant process meaning that all customers can opt in to be charged by a meter if they wish. This year so far in 2025-26 we have already installed almost 3,000 new household meters requested by our customers through this route. We even tell the properties wastewater provider of the switch to ensure that the wastewater bills are moved to metered and that the customer journey is frictionless.

We actively promote the benefits of switching to a water meter on our website at <https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/metering/switching-to-metering/> and this also includes a calculator to work out whether customers are likely to benefit financially from the switch.

To support customers further in this process any customer who opts in to having a water meter also receives the benefit of 'lowest bill guarantee' tariff for the first 12 months of having the meter. This means they are guaranteed to not pay more than they do today for that first year. This enables them to take advantage of all the water efficiency support we offer and enables them to make any necessary changes for reducing bills in the future.

The company's smart water meter roll out will mean all customers move to billing through a meter, not just those with a water meter today. For identification of leakage this is a positive position, and we will continue to review and utilise our internal regulatory frameworks to speed up the implementation of smart water meters where possible.

* The response continues onto the next slide

By May 2026 we will have automated our leak alerts and alarms for customers with a smart water meter.

We will continue to undertake supporting meter checks for customers requesting a leak allowance.

We will continue to promote meters to our customers and offer the support as we currently do.

We will continue to use our leak allowances and policy to support our customers with future reviews on effectiveness to be scheduled.



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Q3. Proactive Leak detection and bill shock prevention

Customers want earlier intervention, automated alerts and reduced burden of proof when leaks occur (Q3. A, B, C, D combined)

Please find the response from Portsmouth Water’s Action Plan below (Page 3 of 3)

Timescale

A key piece of work for the company is to continue to work with our customers to identify leaks and get these fixed with the least amount of water being wasted. Our leak allowance policy actively supports our customers by reducing the bill impact of the leak to the customers usual usage prior to that leak. This is the equivalent of 'capping' the bill impact. Many customers benefit from that process but many customers, for many reasons, elect to let the leak continue rather than fix the leak. In these cases, it is extremely important that the customer is penalised for that decision rather than being afforded the protection that many of our customers take advantage of when acting reasonably

Hidden underground leaks are covered by our leak allowance policy, and we offer a free 1-hour leak detection visit to support our customers to find these leaks through our highly trained technicians.

In addition to the above, we also work with vulnerable customers by either repairing leaks for free when appropriate (and applying a leak allowance) or contacting Social Housing landlords directly to co-ordinate repairs, reducing potential anxiety and impact for our most vulnerable of customers. Our Demand Reduction team, coupled with a new role we are setting up to lead our Vulnerable Customer Team, will expand our work with Social Housing Providers to make the journey easier for impacted customers.

The company offers a broad range of payment terms for our customers based on their circumstances and the situation. Where customers have had leaks or even for any reason, higher than normal usage, then we will always look to offer payment arrangements that are affordable for our customers, and these align to Ofwat's Paying Fair Guidelines.

We offer access to customers to both free retrofit water efficiency devices and visit offerings. We continue to make these available to our customers but additionally we are launching in June 2026 our virtual water efficiency hub which provides support to customers. This will allow customers to undertake a virtual review of how they use water, their water use devices etc and how they may be able to reduce their usage through using behavioural change approaches. All these elements are free, promoted and encouraged as part of the work we do with customers and the community.

We will continue to offer our 1-hour free leak detection service for all customers who need our support.

By September 2026, our Community Engagement leads working with our Vulnerability Lead (to be appointed in May 2026) will expand the work with Social Housing Landlords around metering, leaks and reducing bills through efficient usage

We will continue to provide payment arrangements that meet our customers' needs and look to review effectiveness of those offered arrangements

By June 2026 we will launch our industry leading virtual water efficiency hub and make available to customers.

By April 2027 we will have expanded our water efficiency partnerships that provide solutions and support to reduce water usage

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 9th 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 13th 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 16th March



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Water Voice - Accountability Session

Action plan response

Annex

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie
Research & Energy Saving Trust

ccw.org.uk

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 2025** 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?

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.

Portsmouth Water 2025-26 bill insert

Attached is a copy of our 2025-26 bill insert which goes with both paper and digital bills.

Portsmouth Water

Looking after you and your water, every day

Keeping your water supply reliable, affordable and ready for the future

What you need to know about your bill

We understand that household budgets are under pressure. That's why we don't take any bill increase lightly and why we want to be clear about what's changing.

From April 2026, the average Portsmouth Water bill will increase from **£150 to £162 a year**. That's **£1 more per month** compared to last year.

These increases include inflation and go towards important improvements, like fixing more leaks and protecting the environment, to keep your water reliable, affordable and ready for the future.

We still have the **lowest average water bills in England and Wales**, and we're committed to keeping water affordable.

Find out more about your charges at [PortsouthWater.co.uk/our-charges](https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/our-charges)

What your bill helps make possible

Fixing leaks faster

You've told us reducing leaks is your number one priority, and we agree. That's why we're investing to:

- halve leaks by 2040 - saving enough to supply a town the size of Bognor Regis every day
- find and fix problems faster

Keeping your drinking water high quality

Behind the scenes, we're making sure your water meets high standards today and in the future by:

- continually upgrading our treatment works and using new technologies
- investigating and monitoring for PFAS (forever chemicals)

Protecting the environment we all rely on

Our region is home to rare chalk streams and sensitive habitats, including the Embs, Meon and Lavant. We're protecting them by:

- studying local river environments to make sure they thrive in the long term
- securing sustainable water sources for the future
- supporting projects that restore habitats and improve biodiversity
- building the first major new reservoir for 30 years, the Havant Thicket Reservoir

Getting smarter about water

All our customers will have smart water meters by 2035. They'll help you to:

- better understand and manage your water use
- spot leaks early, before they become a bigger problem

Did you know?

We're using specialist leak detection tools - including trained dogs - to sniff out hidden leaks faster.

Find out how we're protecting water supplies and improving services, visit [PortsouthWater.co.uk/SaveWater](https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/SaveWater) or scan the QR code.

Help if you're finding it hard to pay

If you're worried about your bill, help is at hand. We offer:

- reduced bills for eligible customers
- payment plans and debt support
- protection for customers with higher essential water use

Find out what support is available at [PortsouthWater.co.uk/help-with-my-bills](https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/help-with-my-bills)

Sign up and manage your account online

An online account makes it easier to stay in control.

You can:

- view and pay bills
- submit meter readings
- track water use if you have a smart meter
- update preferences and support details

[MyAccount.PortsouthWater.co.uk](https://myaccount.portsmouthwater.co.uk)

Portsmouth Water

hi@portsmouthwater.co.uk
023 9249 9666
[PortsouthWater.co.uk](https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk)

You will see how we are using QR codes already in this document. In previous years we have included where the money is spent image but this year adjusted based on customer feedback that they would prefer to know more about what we are doing. The other link in the inter takes customers to our money spent (on the website) and this link for ease is <https://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk/customer-services/our-charges>

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Thank you!



ccw.org.uk