

A large, stylized teal wave graphic that spans across the middle of the page. It consists of three main peaks, with the first and third being smaller than the second. The wave has a thick, rounded stroke and a slight shadow effect, giving it a 3D appearance.

CCW

The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Affinity Water Accountability Session transcript

21ST APRIL 2026

Attendance list

Adam Stephens	CFO of Affinity Water
Rebecca Froud	Director of Customer Experience at Affinity Water
Steve Plumb	Director of Asset Strategy and Capital Delivery of Affinity Water
Clare Glen	Qualitative Research Director at Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead facilitator
Bev Keogh	Independent Board Member for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
12 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under Affinity Water

CCW Chair: [Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining us. My name is Bev Keogh and I'll be chairing today's discussion. Tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme. The purpose of Water Voice is simple but important] ... it is to give customers a stronger, more direct voice in how their water company performs, communicates and improves. This session is about accountability, it's an important opportunity for customers to question senior leaders from Affinity Water directly about the issues that matter most to them, about where improvement is needed and about what will change as a result of this discussion. This is not a complaints hearing and it's not a technical inquiry, it's a structured, truly customer led conversation focused on accountability, learning and agreeing clear, practical actions.

The topics that we're going to explore and cover this evening haven't been chosen by Affinity Water or by the Consumer Council for Water, they've been shaped by the panel that are here this evening themselves, shaped by customers through ongoing surveys and discussions. To the panel, I'd like to say it's important to understand that as customers, tonight is your agenda.

As the chair of the session, I want to set a real clear tone from the outset. I expect this to be a respectful but challenging discussion. Customers should feel able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and their expectations, and equally we expect clear and transparent responses from Affinity Water's senior team.

The session is being fully transcribed and will be published, a summary report will follow and the company is expected to publish an action plan responding to the commitments made tonight. That transparency is really key and it's what makes this whole process meaningful.

In terms of ground rules, we'll take one person at a time, we'll keep contributions focused and we'll concentrate on forward looking actions, what will change, by when and how customers will know. Can I introduce some of those joining us this evening but firstly, I'd like to introduce our independent lead facilitator from our research partner, Taylor McKenzie, Clare Glen, who will guide the discussion and ensure that all voices are heard, and we'll hear more from Clare in a second.

Representing Affinity Water this evening, we're delighted to welcome Adam Stephens, Chief Financial Officer, Rebecca Froud, Director of Customer Experience and Anton Gazzard, Director of Customer Delivery, and Steve Plumb, Director of Asset Strategy and Capital Delivery. Thank you all for being here this evening.

Now I'm going to hand over to Clare, so Clare, can you begin your part of the discussion, please?

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much, Bev and thanks everyone for joining. Just before we begin, I want to explain how names in the transcripts will be handled. In the room this evening, we'll use first names only, thank you everybody for putting your names up, and in the published transcript, we'll ensure all customer names are redacted.

So after the session, you'll have the opportunity to review the transcript before it's published, and if there's anything you've said that you prefer to be removed or further anonymised, you can request that and that will be respected.

The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect the discussion and the actions agreed, it's not to single out any individual. For each question we will follow the same structure, a community member will ask the question first, Affinity Water will have five minutes to

respond and we'll have a little timer for them to keep tabs of the time. The community member will then react to that response and then we'll work together to define the actions that must form part of the company's action plan.

We'll create a live document to capture the expected actions and outcomes from both Affinity Water and community members, and we'll share that on the screen. Affinity Water will then have some time to respond to any specific actions they feel are out of scope or they would like to refine further.

This webinar's being made available for live viewing to members of the CCW team, Defra, Ofwat, Affinity Water, the Affinity Water Independent Challenge Group chair, and community members on the CCW Water Voice Panel.

With all the formalities now done, I would love to get a round of introductions around the virtual room. If you could all just introduce yourselves, just your first name and where you're based this evening. I'm going to work round my screen here so if I could start with Community Member 1, you're on my top left of my screen, hi.

Community Member 1: Hi there, I'm Community Member 1 and I'm from Essex.

Community Member 2: My name's Community Member 2 and I'm from Hertford in Hertfordshire.

Community Member 3: Good evening, my name's Community Member 3 and I'm also from Essex.

Community Member 4: Evening, I'm Community Member 4 and I'm from Surrey.

Community Member 5: Hi, I'm Community Member 5 and I'm from Bushey in Hertfordshire.

Community Member 6: Hi, I'm Community Member 6, I'm from Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire

Community Member 7: Hi, I'm Community Member 7 and I'm from Radlett in Hertfordshire.

Community Member 8: Hi, I'm Community Member 8, I'm from North London.

Community Member 9: Hi, I'm Community Member 9, I'm from North West London.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 11¹, I'm afraid your sound's not working, maybe Kirsten² can jump in and help. Great, I'd like to hand back over to Bev.

CCW Chair: Thank you. Now we're going to kick off the session with the first question. The first question this evening is going to be asked by Community Member 2, and it will be answered by Adam and Rebecca from Affinity [Water]. Community Member 2, the question and context is on the screen, can I hand over to you please, for you to ask the question of the senior team?

Community Member 2: Good evening. As customers, we are paying more year on year but do not feel it is clear what standards of service Affinity Water is actually meant to deliver. In

¹ Community Member 10 and Community Member 11 are present at time of introductions but experience technical issues and are unable to introduce themselves formally. Community Member 12 joins late, also due to technical issues.

² Technical support representative from Taylor McKenzie Research

practical terms, that means things like being able to easily submit meter readings, have reliable water pressure, timely repairs and clear communication.

[Technical issues]

CCW Chair: Community Member 2, would you please mind starting again so we can get the whole context understood by the Affinity [Water] team as well, please.

Community Member 2: As customers, we are paying more year on year but do not feel it is clear what standards of service Affinity Water is actually meant to deliver. In practical terms, that means things like being able to easily submit meter readings, have reliable water pressure, timely repairs and clear communication when something goes wrong. If you say service is improving, we want transparency about how that is being measured and how Affinity [Water] compares with other water companies, so we can judge whether we are getting that value for money.

What standard of service should we be able to expect from Affinity Water now? Who sets those standards? And how do you compare with other water companies? Can we see for ourselves whether we are actually getting the service we are paying for?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 2. Do we have Adam and Rebecca in? We've moved the question into chat. Adam and Rebecca, in responding, it would be really helpful if you could be quite specific and answer the elements of the question that Community Member 2 has asked us. I say that because there's going to be a timer of five minutes on the screen and I really want you to make the most of that five minutes, to answer the question fully. If you could limit jargon as much as possible and if I think that you're really answering it and could do with a bit more time, I do have a discretion to give you a couple of extra minutes, which I might well do. Adam, I'll hand over to you and you can decide whether it's you or Rebecca that's going to kick off the response.

Adam Stephens: I'll open and between Rebecca and I, we'll pick up the various points of that question. Firstly, thank you very much all for joining us today and asking us a really good first question. I thought I'd pick it up in about four parts, perhaps if Rebecca can answer a bit in a minute on meter readings and communication when something goes wrong because those are the specific parts of I think some of the experience that Community Member 2's had.

If I pick up the first part which is the chat at the moment, service standards are set for us by a number of different regulators, we're regulated by three or four different regulatory bodies but the main one that links together both service and costs and bills is Ofwat, and we agree with them every five years, a plan for a five-year period that covers both the performance they expect, the investment that we would like to do and that they require and then how that turns into bills.

We report every year in a document that is publicly available called the Annual Performance Report and that covers a whole range of different things relating to our performance, our investment, it really does kind of give you a real drains up on the business, I appreciate it's not the most user friendly document in itself but there are user guides as well that try and summarise it and make it more accessible for people.

Ofwat also do a comparison annually as well, so we report on our performance against the targets we've agreed with Ofwat and then Ofwat compare our performance with all the other water companies' performance and they publish a report which provides that comparison. You asked specifically how we compare to other water companies; now we're a water-only company so we are measured on a subset of the measures that the bigger companies that include waste, are measured against and actually when you look across

that measure set for last year, we were joint top performer across those measures alongside Portsmouth Water. We were really proud of that performance and we know that we've focused really hard over the last two or three years to move ourselves up that league table.

Just to give you a sense of where we're strong and where we know that we need to improve: we're really good at leakage, over the last year or so we've really driven leakage down by quite a lot and we've exceeded our target on that front, and actually supply interruptions as well, so that's how many minutes would our customers experience a lack of water over a year, and we are really in the top quartile of that, there's only two or three companies that perform as well as we do.

We know we need to improve on C-MeX, which is Ofwat's definition of broad customer experience and it's quite a complicated measure, but we know we need to improve on that measure, and also on household consumption, so our customer base uses more water than other customer regions and we know that we can play a part in working with customers like yourselves on water usage and efficiency and also internal leakage and things like that.

You also mentioned water pressure. We're pretty average on water pressure. We're the only company at the moment that have agreed a specific measure with Ofwat that measures water pressure, but we know that Ofwat are actually gathering that data across the sector and having seen that, we think we're pretty average but it's something we're very focused on and looking to improve over the next year or so as well. Rebecca, do you want to talk about meter readings and communications?

CCW Chair: That's really helpful background, Adam, but they're asking in practical terms for transparency, where do they go? You mentioned the Annual Performance Report, practical terms for transparency, so I think that part of the question, it's really important that we get an answer for the panel on that tonight. Carry on, Rebecca.

Rebecca Froud: Let me pick that piece up first. I think transparency wise, we are improving in that space, so anyone who's visited our website, we're starting now to publish more data in this space that show you [1] what do we do to try and support delivery in those areas that you've identified and [2] what your feedback is based on that. We stood up something called Your Voice Matters, it's a publication that is refreshed quarterly and it picks up a number of the topics that you've raised, Community Member 2, and starts to say, "This is what you have asked for as our customer base" from a range of different material such as survey results, customer panel results, complaint data, contact data. But then more importantly, what are we doing to fix those things and where are we going to be changing? It's quite a wide range of topics, I won't go through them, I'd love some feedback from the panel on what you think it provides for readership and tries to engage with you on the things that you've said that matter versus our transparency and how we can be clear in how we deliver services.

If I pick up the metering element of the question, we've actually got about 1.2 million meters across our regions and 94%, 95% of those are read twice yearly. That improves even better when we've started to put smart meters into our patch, we're going to put 400,000 of those in during the next four years and that gives us actual reads every hour, so customers can start to see that within a new mobile app and a web application, that if they choose to, they can actually engage with and start to see how that meter reading is ... seeing their usage, so that you only pay for what you use.

The other thing that's coming in in about 12 weeks' time, we're just about to implement it, is customers' ability to put their own meter reading into their account, so again, you can start to work out usage and it will start to give you graphs as to how much water the household used during that period of time, so that we can then support with if we think

that there is a leak evident in the building, we can support with sending someone out to help.

We're also going to be putting into place an appointment calendar so customers get the choice of we will visit you when is convenient for you. Now, that doesn't stop people being able to phone and do all of those things in the same way, but we do know that one of the things our customers are asking for is to do some of these things digitally, so we're trying to deliver those services.

The other thing that will help with is the second part of your question, Community Member 2, which was how we communicate in a consistent manner and we know that at points in time, we have struggled to connect with customers in lots of different ways, whether that be postal, email, online, text messages, etc, and it's about us adapting to make sure we deliver it in a way that you want as a customer. Everyone's individual, you all have different needs and the way that we can try and engage with you to say, "How would you like to receive your communication? How would you like alerts? How can we deliver your bill to you?", is very important to keep you informed but also give you the power to tell us, "This is how I want to receive information from Affinity Water", whereas probably, previously, we've delivered it in a one dimensional way which does need to improve. I'll pause there because I think I might have run out of time.

CCW Chair: No, you haven't, it's fine, it was important that you got that part out, I think, for the panel to hear. So, we're now going to pause and turn back to customers, to the panel itself. Clare, you'll guide this part of the discussion to make sure that, to add any specific actions based on what we heard from Adam and Rebecca this evening, that should form part of the accountability plan. I'm going to hand over to you. Thank you, Adam and Rebecca, we'll come back to you shortly.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks so much for your contribution there. Thanks, Bev. So for this part of the session, we're going to focus on your reaction to what you've heard. We're not going to take any new questions necessarily at this point, we're going to just focus on what we've heard and I'd like you to tell me what you think was clear there, what was concrete and what was being said, was there anything that was particularly vague or uncertain or anything in particular that was missing? And what specific actions or commitments you feel need to be strengthened going forward. That's a lot, people are taking notes which is great, so now's your chance to tell us a bit about that. And if you feel you're getting to a point where you want to ask a question, we'll try and turn that round into, "The commitment I want to hear is X, Y and Z". We'll capture points first before inviting any further clarifications from the company. I see lots of hands up first but I might like to go back to Community Member 2 because you asked the question, it would be great to understand are you happy with the response to your question?

Community Member 2: Thank you for the answers and the Ofwat being your main regulator comes as no real surprise to us, I think. However, just a couple of things I wanted to clarify there, you said that you set your standards for Ofwat, do you set your own standard as opposed to what another company ...? What I'm trying to get at, if there's 40 utility providers, are there 40 different standards agreed with Ofwat? Or do you all have to have a base level because that's my issue, if you're performing very well at your level, is your level lower than another company's that Ofwat have agreed? That was my first question, who sets your standards that you're allowed to try and adhere to? And are you allowed to set different standards to different utility providers, so are we getting a better or a worse standard from our neighbours who may have agreed different standards with Ofwat?

TMcK Facilitator: I'll let Rebecca jump in at the end of our 10 minutes here. Is there any other comments?

Community Member 3: It was good to hear where the company is performing well and also the acknowledgement of where there could be improvement, I want to pick up on the two things that were highlighted for improvement: the C-MeX, that's basically the broad term for customer services, and also household consumption, so support with saving water. Really it was has there been or clarification of what "good" looks like? What improvement on those two areas is being strived for in the next year?

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything specifically you would like to see as an action point on that?

Community Member 3: I'd like to see something clear, a clear target, if that is a percentage of improvement.

TMcK Facilitator: Anybody else like to jump in on what you've heard? Now is your chance! Is everybody happy with the response around Your Voice Matters, as an option, or the User Guide around performance? Are we happy with the way that that information has been communicated? Have we seen it? Is there anything else you would like to see in that space?

Community Member 2: Could I just ask something quickly? Yesterday, I had my new meter fitted, the remote meter fitted. When will the dashboard come up for that and when will that be operational so I can actually real time see my water usage?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2, is there anything in particular beyond usage that you want to see in the dashboard? I don't know what stage they're at in terms of development but is there anything that you as a customer want an action to be taken on that?

Community Member 2: I would like to see the dashboard be very much centred around being able to show me when my usage is higher and lower, and whether or not there's anything that you can build into that dashboard that will give me practical advice about when my usage does become higher, as ways to possibly mitigate that, if it's excessive use or even just high use. Fabulous, I'm very pleased to have the meter but unless it's backed up with a really good web app or a dashboard, I think we lose the value of the hard work that you're putting in.

TMcK Facilitator: So clear actions there, thank you. Community Member 6?

Community Member 6: Just related to that, I got my letter yesterday saying I was getting my meter fitted, so it was the first I'd heard of it and I think similarly to what Community Member 2 said, I would also be interested to see what I'm using my water on. So my electric provider often says, "You're using the most electric on refrigeration" or "charging your car", I don't know how that works but it tells me this is where I am so I can tangibly reduce my water usage, and I'd be very interested to know the same and if that's possible with the new meter, because the letter didn't give that much clarity around it.

TMcK Facilitator: Anybody else want to jump in at this point? Anything that you've heard that's of interest or you want to create into an action or a commitment from Affinity [Water]? No? We talked about setting standards and publishing those clear standards so people know what kind of level of service that they should expect in our briefing session, is there anything else you'd want to see in terms of those standards and how that's communicated?

Community Member 10: Just a quick question, it all sounded really good and that's brilliant, but will there be consistent updates in terms of exactly what's going on or ...?

TMcK Facilitator: What would you like to know, Community Member 10?

Community Member 10: Just updates on any changes really because I think sometimes this is the problem, there seems that sort of gap and something changes but as a customer, we're not actually notified, just various things, really. I think particularly when you have a meter, the changes in terms of bill, obviously I know we can login and look at our account but is sort of major updates something that's already on the agenda?

TMcK Facilitator: We can certainly turn that into an action, thank you.

Community Member 3: In terms of the performance, the dashboard, forgive me if it's there already but is that broken down by area? Because you cover two or three or maybe more counties, you might be really good in Hertfordshire but pretty poor in Surrey, so can that be broken down by region or county or however you define your areas? Because the overall stats might look good but when they're broken down, there might be areas of the county or counties that still need a bit of work.

TMcK Facilitator: Any other questions or points of clarification or commitments we'd like to see? I know one of the points we raised in the session was about billing issues when there is a problem, and we talked about making it easier for customers to challenge billing or meter reading issues when something doesn't look right. Does someone have an experience of that they'd like to share or someone raised that as an issue, an interesting point to raise tonight?

Community Member 2: I had a meter reading, I had a letter some two, three months ago from you saying you thought there was a leak and I was using excessive amounts of water. I went and checked and I wasn't and actually I contacted you and put the meter reading in and they said they couldn't accept my meter reading because you gave two a year, at that point. I just thought, I think that's quite a difficult thing for people to receive because they may think they've done something wrong when it was clearly just an error on behalf of the meter or the reading. So, I'm wondering if there's any way that before you would send out such a letter, would there be a way you'd be able to check at whose end is the fault?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 7, you've got your hand up?

Community Member 7: Yes, I know of several people who have had letters saying that there has been, that there's leaks in their homes and they've panicked about it and there hasn't been anything. It seems to be something that Affinity Water are doing, I don't know who they're picking on and they did send somebody round to a friend's house to check something, and then whoever they sent round caused a problem, caused an airlock in the water thing, so they then had to get a plumber in to come and fix it. So they are sending letters out to people randomly, I know several people, luckily I haven't had one. And nobody's had a leak but they've been alerted that they've used an excessive amount of water and there may be a leak, so they've caused panic. That was all.

TMcK Facilitator: So just some reassurance, being more proactive.

Community Member 1: My point is just around visibility, really. Been in the property for about 10 years, previously we'd put in a meter, the bills keep going up but I don't see any lads actually doing any work in terms of maintenance around my way or in other areas of the county. I believe they're over in Hatfield so maybe people in that area maybe see their vans and lads out maintaining pipes, etc. I'd just be interested to know, really.

TMcK Facilitator: So more visibility in your local area and tracking that.

Community Member 1: It's just to know where your money is going.

TMcK Facilitator: There was mention here, the company was aware that their Annual Performance Report is not as customer friendly as it could be, which is what was mentioned. I just wondered if there's any action points we'd like to raise on that one? Anything you'd like to see on that?

Community Member 8: Rebecca talked about the smart water meters, as someone doesn't have a water meter at the moment, I have a lot of scepticism and a lot of worry whether the billing will be accurate and I just want to know from that point of view, in terms of Affinity Water's point of view, how can I be confident and be reassured that smart meters would provide accurate readings? Because I haven't had that discussion, it almost feels like the water company might be forcing it on me when I have concerns, so I wanted to get some reassurance and find out more about what the company is doing to reassure us as customers about that.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Community Member 8, that's a clear objective. Community Member 3, did you want to come in on the performance report?

Community Member 3: No, it's really specifically picking up what Community Member 8 was saying around performance of the water meter. One of the things I really like is the guaranteed standards scheme, where when what you are expecting isn't delivered, then there is accountability and you can get payments. But I don't think there's anything on there about when your water meter is inaccurate and I have experienced that, not recently but about two years ago. So I think that sort of "our commitment to you" statement and the different areas under it, like if a missed appointment, is this is wrong, if that's wrong, then I think it would give more confidence to people like Community Member 8 who will be at some point be getting a meter, if that was added, that if there's an issue with your meter.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much everyone, that's some really clear points of action. I'd like to share with you the hard work behind the scenes that have been going on to capture some of those points that we've raised, I'm going to share my screen again. You'll see here a list of actions that we've captured, some of them have been drawn from what Affinity [Water] has told us tonight, in terms of their commitments and others have been shaped by what customers have said need clarifying or strengthening.

I'm going to focus on the actions here which is under "What would an ideal water company response look like in the eyes of our community?", and I'm going to read these actions out and for you to have a think about is that action clear? Is it specific enough? Is it time bound? So our metrics we'd want to use against them, and would it feel meaningful from a customer's point of view?

So if something feels too vague or lacks that timeframe or doesn't go far enough, this is the moment to tighten it up. An action is only going to be agreed when it's clear, specific, measurable and where possible, meaningful for customers, if it doesn't meet that standard, we're going to refine it just now together and we'll not move on until we're clear on that wording.

I'm going to share the first one is around to clarify who sets service standards and if likely Ofwat standards are consistent across providers and to see how Affinity [Water] performs compared to other providers.

Number 2 is around clearly explain what improvements have been made towards the two company weakness areas around leakage and household water consumption; can we show that as a percentage perhaps from a prior year?

Number 3 was to ensure dashboard shows specifics on water usage data so that's practical metrics like level alerts on water usage, clarity of what water is being used for and a breakdown by county or regional level.

Number 4 was to provide consistent updates on company activity and changes, for example, bill changes or digitalisation of services.

Number 5 was around more proactive checking of billing and meter information before sending out alert communication, so ensure there's actually an issue before sending out that letter.

Number 6 was around greater visibility of local company activity and projects, so let customers know what is going on in their area.

Number 7 is around providing reassurance that smart meters will give accurate meter readings.

I'd like to hand back now to Bev.

CCW Chair: I can see there's an eighth, some extra wording just under Point 7. There we are!

TMcK Facilitator: Apologies, we've got a Number 8! Have standards, accountability measures in place for inaccurate meter information or poor handling of meter issues, so the meter issue, in those two points there.

How do we feel about these action points? Do you feel that it's captured what we've talked about? Is there anything missing? Anything we'd like to refine?

Community Member 7: I don't understand what it means "clarity over what water is being used for"? What would the dashboard show? Is it what I'm using? Or what you're using, Affinity Water are doing with the water? I don't really know what that phrase is specific to.

TMcK Facilitator: We'll refine that, but it was around how you're using your water.

Community Member 7: To know whether I've got my washing machine on or just a tap running for me to have a bath, is that what you're saying?

TMcK Facilitator: Who raised that point about usage? Was it Community Member 2? Wanting to know how your water's being used in your home?

Community Member 7: I can't see the point of that, if I need to put my washing machine on, I need to put it on, I don't need you telling me that I've had my washing machine on, what a waste of money and time for you to identify something that much, surely?

Community Member 8: I think that came from Community Member 6 who was saying that her smart meter can say if she's using heavy load domestic appliances like the fridge freezer. I just wonder if there's a way that it can alert us that we're using an excessive amount of water, surely the system can tell the difference between, I don't know, a hose being used ...?

Community Member 6: That was me who said that and it was essentially because if I'm using my dishwasher every night, if I know I'm using an excessive amount and I could save a lot of money for myself, I would want to know that because I have the option to reduce it. I also have a hot tub in my garden so I'm guessing my hose would be quite a lot, so if I understood how much I was using and how much I could save if I didn't use that thing, if I really wanted to save money that month, I could make the effort to do that. So I guess it's

having that clear transparency to what I can personally do to save myself money and also save water if we're in a drought or whatever, in summer, which does sometimes happen.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks for clarifying, Community Member 6. Community Member 3?

Community Member 3: I don't think Number 2 is correct, the two company weakness areas, they weren't leakage, it was C-MeX, so customer measure of experience and household water consumption, which I'm assuming means support to make savings. I think that needs tightening up, that measure, so what I was asking for was that a target percentage improvement is set and then that is published alongside what was actually achieved as a percentage.

And I think possibly, the two questions at the end around meters, I'm not sure [6] "provide reassurance", how that's going to be done but I think those two could be combined and that there is a clear commitment that if the meter is inaccurate, there will be a refund. I think that needs pinning down to be added to your guaranteed standard scheme and part of the commitment, I think those two could possibly be combined.

TMcK Facilitator: Any other points or points of clarification, or anything else we want to build on here? No? I think we seem quite happy, we've got lots there, which is fantastic. I was going to hand back to Bev at this point.

CCW Chair: What we haven't got here are the timescales so if it's okay, Clare, with the panel and I'll speak to Affinity [Water] about this in a second, maybe that's something that could be developed once the company have had a look at the actions in more detail, and we can bring that back to the panel. Adam and Rebecca, I'd like to give you an opportunity just for five minutes, to have a look at what the panel have written here for you as actions, are there any commitments here that you feel are not feasible, that you feel you absolutely could not achieve? And if that is the case, if you can explain why, even if there's regulatory, financial, operational, legal constraints, just in the context of transparency, it's important we understand why you can't agree to something. So what are you thinking, both of you?

Adam Stephens: Firstly, it's really good to see the discussion and thank you very much for the feedback, it's super valuable and it really does help us think, I think, about the way that we communicate because I think a lot of this clearly is information that we have, that we would like to put in your hands so that you're as educated as we are. I think that the process you've gone through has shaped some really good actions, I can't see anything on here that we wouldn't be able to deliver on.

I'm hoping that a lot of this is helpful for us in terms of how we can communicate better and one of the things I would like to clarify, when I said the Annual Performance Report, I think it's a really important document here that isn't particularly user friendly, just to clarify, we do produce a user friendly version but obviously, there's a very long set template that we use for regulatory reporting. The other place I would point you to is Discover Water, which is an industry wide repository of customer friendly information on things like performance of water companies, and it provides both company specific information as well as comparatives. But in crafting response to some of these actions, we can provide links and reference points to that as well.

CCW Chair: Also, rather than the emphasis be on the customers to find it, it's clarity on how you make it transparent as well with the commitment, to provide that information to the customers as Rebecca said. Rebecca any comments from you? Anything there that you think you can't agree to?

Rebecca Froud: No, it absolutely is a minimum for me that these are the things that we should be able to give you access to in a seamless way. How you can consume those in a

way that we set them up in a simplistic – and I don't want mean that in a rude way – but in a way that is understandable by a vast majority of our customers, so that you can use it to benefit yourselves.

Probably my ask back is what is the best way for some of these to be delivered? Because some of them are very specific to a certain customer type, what we've tried to do is do it via social post, web update, on our bills, on our alert pages, etc and there's a range of different ways we can do some of this. What we try to do is adapt it so that it manages to customers' expectations and needs and again, it comes down to each person is individual, we're not all robots so we like it in a way that we want to consume it ourselves. So doing that in as many ways as we possibly can, we will attempt. What would be good is to hear from the panel at some point, what is the best way to do that for certain topics that you feel, on behalf of other customers, we can deliver for you?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Rebecca. Clare, I think that is a really valid ask actually from Rebecca, it's one that I was thinking about as the questions were being shaped, is what does successful communication look like and so if you can take that away as an action to build on?

TMcK Facilitator: That would be great, yes.

CCW Chair: So I haven't heard any pushback from Affinity [Water], far from it, so for the record we have now agreed the actions under this question, albeit with some more explanation in terms of accessibility and then the work on the timescales will be done as well, we'll share that with Rebecca and Adam. Thank you very much for that. Adam, Anton hasn't joined this evening?

Adam Stephens: Just to clarify, for consistency, I'm going to stay on for all three questions and Steve and I, Steve Plumb, who has joined, will cover with me on the next two questions.

CCW Chair: So, we'll welcome Steve.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Rebecca.³

[Technical issues]

CCW Chair: We're now going to kick off the next part of this session with the second question, that question is going to be asked by Community Member 8, thank you. Steve, very similar to Question 1, same format, context and question on the screen and I'm going to hand over to Community Member 8 to ask the question.

Community Member 8: Thank you very much, Bev. The question that I want to ask today is as customers, we do not just want to know that water is working today. We want confidence that Affinity Water is planning properly for the future as well. We're particularly concerned about the long-term sustainability and the growing pressures on services, particularly because the South East region, which is where Affinity Water supplies, is a particularly water stressed area, and we wonder whether the company is really preparing for the future demand rather than waiting for the problems to happen and then reacting to them.

How is Affinity Water making sure water supplies will remain reliable in the future, with growing demand and longer-term pressure on resources, and why should customers like us feel confident that the company is planning enough ahead for their communities?

³ Rebecca Froud exits the main discussion room at this point and Steve Plumb joins the main meeting room.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 8. Steve and Adam, can I ask you for five minutes on this question, can you be quite concise in your answer and answer exactly what was in the question, I'll hand over to you.

Adam Stephens: I will open very quickly and hand over to Steve. Thanks, Community Member 8, that's a really good question and something we spend a lot of time on. We're spending over £700m over the next few years on long term resilience, we are well versed in producing long term plans and stress testing for climate change. Steve will talk about in a moment, the things that we're doing on our strategic resource options, which you'll hear about in a second. More network connectivity, the work we're doing on leakage and also household usage, which we talked about earlier, and I think it's worth noting that the household usage in our region, each household uses about 400 litres of water a day, which is at the higher end of what different communities use in the country. So, it's definitely an area we're looking to focus on as well, but I'll let Steve talk in a bit more detail about those points.

Steve Plumb: Thank you, Adam. I guess to start, the document that we use and the planning process that we use looks out 25 years into the future. It's called the Water Resources Management Plan and that's on our website and I believe we do publish a very customer centric version of that. What that plan does, it considers two things: how much water do customers want, we call that demand, and how much water can we supply? Clearly, we're looking to make sure that we can continue to supply more than customers demand as we look forward into the future, and that changes because population changes and we get growth in our region and we get more not only household customers, but more non-household customers, so businesses that use water in our region. We try and forecast that out for 50 years in advance and we look to see what do we do need to do?

If you look at our plan, at the moment it broadly falls into three areas. The first is we need to, in the short term, we need to look very closely at demand, so we've touched on how much each customer uses at the moment and it's one of our challenge areas at the moment, as Adam and Rebecca said previously. We call that or the measure that Ofwat call that is per capita consumption and on average in our region, that's over 150 litres per person, per day, that's a lot and that's more than in most parts of this country.

So for us, there's a big workstream about how do we encourage customers to use less water? Smart meters are part of that solution but some of the more behavioural stuff in terms of helping educate customers about what can they do to use less water in their daily lives? There's a lot of that on our website currently and it would be interesting to hear some of your views about how accessible is that and how useful is that?

The other thing and we've touched on this is leakage and we ask customers to play their part but we need to play our part too. We have about 13% of the water we put into the supply leaks from our network and that's not good enough. We have committed to reducing leakage by 20% by 2050, we've made a really good start on that, in the previous five years, we reduced it by just over 19%, we're targeting to do another 13% in this five-year period, so we're on that journey but we recognise that we need to go as hard as possible to play our part in making sure that water doesn't leak out of our network.

If I look slightly more long term, we need some new sources of water and this is really exciting, we've got two really big solutions for this. One is called the Grand Union Canal Scheme, this is bringing water from Birmingham down the Grand Union Canal into our patch, where we can treat it and put it into supply in our area, so it's a new source of water in our region. It's a brilliant scheme, it's using this Victorian asset to repurpose it for public water supply and there's lots and lots of on our website, I'll be really happy to share lots of information about that.

The other scheme is a scheme that you might know as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option or you might know it as White Horse Reservoir. It's a brand new reservoir that's being commissioned by us, Thames Water and Southern Water because this is a problem in the South East of England, and it's a solution that's going to be built in Oxfordshire and it will provide us with again, it will capture water when it's in the Thames, it will store that on the side of the Thames and it will allow us to take that water and use it when we need it, you know, when it's hot or when we're in drought or when demand is high.

So there's a combination in that plan of very short-term stuff around demand and leakage, and some really long-term solutions about how do we bring new water into our patch.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Steve. Clare, I'm going to hand back to you for the panel to have a discussion around what they've heard. Lots of talk about great initiatives and lots of plans and very reassuring to hear what Steve had to share actually, in terms of water security. Again, going via the information on the website, accessibility of communications, it's a really interesting topic for the panel to discuss and I'm going to hand over to you.

TMcK Facilitator: Great, thanks, Bev and thanks for your contribution. For this section, we're going to focus again on your reaction to what you've heard. What was clear? Was there anything that was missing or anything that you would like to find out more about? And specifically, what actions or commitments you would like to see highlighted or strengthened here. I've got lots of hands up, I'm going to go back to Community Member 8 who asked the question, are you happy with that response?

Community Member 8: Yes.

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything you'd like to add here?

Community Member 8: I was actually pleasantly surprised with the response because I thought supply would be forgotten but it was covered quite nicely in that, and I was particularly surprised to hear that in our region, we have the highest or some of the highest use per capita in terms of water usage. I wanted to ask, why do you think that is? Why is it so high? It's very unusual. And what more can Affinity Water do to really help support reducing it because it's all very well, I myself have ordered water saving devices and things like that on their website but it's not really well- I don't feel it's really well advertised, it's not really well publicised so much and I think they could do a lot more to encourage the rest of the people, their customers, to reduce the amount of water that they use.

TMcK Facilitator: So some actions around how they can support that behavioural change that was mentioned. Thank you. Community Member 2?

Community Member 2: I was likewise really pleased to hear about the great idea with the Grand Union Canal bringing water down from the north to the south, and the new reservoir that's being built. Two things about that is: timescale, when do we think that will actually be coming online, both those projects?

And then a follow-through to what Community Member 8 has suggested about trying to encourage changes of behaviour and what you were talking about Steve, about how do we push people into behaviour change. Is there any consideration given to, and I don't know how, a discount? Is there any possibility of some kind of, people do things for money, is there any way of changing anything with regards to if you're a below an average use and that should be quite simple to be able to work out, is there any way that people can earn a rebate on some of their stuff? Because if you're not having to supply me with as much water as the next person indirectly, it must be benefiting your business model as well.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Community Member 2. Hi, Community Member 13, thank you for joining us.

Community Member 13: On the implement, they're going to spend about £700 million, so as a customer, am I able to see anywhere where they want to spend, is there any transparency in that one, that we will see that one? Because that's going to affect us on this because the bill is going to go up, our bill is going to go up, so I want to see that as a transparency online or anything like that, where they are spending the money.

TMcK Facilitator: In terms of this topic area, specifically in terms of resilience and the new schemes? Yes, I assume so. Community Member 4?

Community Member 4: I was also quite surprised about how much water we use in the south compared to other parts of the country and one question was, what research has been done around why that is? Has there been any kind of household surveys completed? I know the population in the south is greater than the north. And then to follow-on from that, what education is going to be input to educate users on how to reduce water and I think to my electric company, they send out stuff saying "It costs 50p to put a heater on for an hour" or stuff like that, so is there an equivalent education scheme you could do in terms of water and how much a bath takes and a shower, and trying to really understand why we use more water in the south than other parts of the country.

TMcK Facilitator: Any other thoughts or anything you'd like to build on, on what you've heard? A few people have not spoken or had the chance to speak up yet, is there anything else you'd like to raise on this one or agree with what's been said, perhaps?

Community Member 3: I also was surprised and pleased about the two initiatives. I think in terms of changing behaviour, for customers, it can feel a little bit vague, being told "reduce your water usage" and I like the suggestion that Community Member 4 made around having examples, but I also think it would be good to have an incentive scheme where a target was set, so people could understand what that might look like; I think I would find that helpful.

Community Member 5: I liked the point that Community Member 2 raised about allowing discounts for households that fall below because I know quite often, come the summer time when there's hosepipe bans and things like that, you see grass in other people's gardens that's particularly green and you know that they're using their hosepipe even though you're not. So it would be nice to somehow incentivise those so that it's fair across households.

TMcK Facilitator: Incentivise that good behaviour.

Community Member 5: Yes.

TMcK Facilitator: But you don't want to penalise the bad behaviour?! The green grass next door!

Community Member 6: As much as I like money, I think it's worth mentioning that incentives don't always have to be money. I'm with Octopus, for example, I get a free coffee, which is technically saving me money, once a week and you get spins of the wheel and you get points, truthfully, I've never spent those points but it does make me like using them as a provider and it does make me feel more positively about using the company, you get points for reducing your usage during their peak hours and I do make a conscious effort to, and I guess that would also be long term beneficial to the company. So just adding that I agree to the idea of incentives but I think there's more ways of doing it.

TMcK Facilitator: Being a bit more creative around incentivisation, fantastic, that's a really clear action.

Community Member 7: I don't understand how they're bringing water down on the Grand Union Canal, is that in container barges or ships or are they flooding the canal with the water? I've got no idea, it was just a vague throwaway phrase, how on earth is it being brought down on the canal?

TMcK Facilitator: I'm sure that's another hour at least discussion but yes, an interesting one, I'm sure we're all probably thinking about how that happens. To your point, a bit more information around what's happening, what are the good news stories and how can we highlight some of the positives?

Community Member 7: Yes, and how they do that, is the water treated before it comes down or is it treated when it gets here? Because the water in Birmingham is very different to the water down here. It's just a throwaway phrase again that means absolutely nothing really, that they said.

TMcK Facilitator: So a bit of clarification.

Community Member 7: Yes, far too vague.

Community Member 5: I just wanted to pick up on I think what Community Member 7 said, about incentivising and I feel very much like it's almost like Affinity Water or water companies are almost like silent providers, we don't hear much from them or about them, it's in a very different way that we hear from energy companies, it's almost like there's lots of adverts on the TV, we kind of know. I'm kind of wondering with the whole idea of incentivising, whether that would make or we could suggest that they become more vocal and more present so that they are not so silent, really. And I like the idea of the possible, the coffee because then it's like bringing them to the forefront of your world, your daily life and I think that's really important, that we begin to actually recognise them as one of our providers rather than this silent company that we don't really interact as much with.

TMcK Facilitator: That's really interesting, so giving them a bit of a personality, so that you can connect a bit better with them in terms of an entity?

Community Member 5: Absolutely, yes.

TMcK Facilitator: That's a really interesting point. Great, is there any last thoughts on this before I share the screen with some of our actions?

Community Member 7: Can I just say he gave the percentage figures on mending leaks, I thought they were incredibly low. He said, "We aim for 50% or something" and he said, "We've done 13%", that's pathetic really, it's very low.

TMcK Facilitator: So some scrutiny around those leakage figures?

Community Member 7: Far too low, why are there so many leaks? What is leaking and where and why?

TMcK Facilitator: Some more information on the key issues around leakage. Any last thoughts before we move on? I'll share the screen. As before, I'd like to read out some of the action points that we've identified and just see if there's any gaps or clear themes that we would like to build on. You'll see again the list of actions, some of them are drawn from Affinity Water's commitments and others on here mostly are shaped by what you've told us tonight, which is fantastic. What's clear? Is there anything specific that we want to address here? Is there any timescales we would like to put on these? And ultimately, we

want to feel that it's meaningful from a customer's perspective so if anything feels too vague here or lacks that timeframe or it doesn't go far enough, we'll tighten them up just now.

I'm going to go ahead and read the first one out, which is to clearly outline reasons for unusually high regional water usage and better advertise water saving measures to customers. Could there be a financial incentive or other reward incentive, we mentioned free coffees, for customers with lower-than-average water usage, to help with that behavioural change? We mentioned the Octopus Energy reward scheme. Also setting a clear target for reduced water usage.

Number 2 was around providing timescales for new water sources and clarifying how that project is being run.

Number 3 is around transparency around where new water resilience scheme spending will go and making sure this is brought to life and advertised online.

Number 4, providing educational schemes to improve water usage literacy in the region.

Number 5 is around increasing company visibility, use customer reward schemes and incentives to do so and as we mentioned, just talking about bringing to life that personality so that we can engage and connect more with our water company.

Number 6, the point just made by Community Member 7 around more specific data on leakage figures and issues, and tighten that up.

I'll throw that back to you, everybody, just to highlight anything you would like to and potentially to add some timescales on this. Anyone like to start us off?

Community Member 4: For me, the educational one, it's something that can be achieved and the wheels set in motion quite quick. A lot of that stuff, they'll have data for like how long it takes, how much usage in the washing machine and stuff like that, and I think that is really, some of the education would then help with some of these other ideas that we've said. The educational stuff I think could be quite easily achieved, quite soon because that data about water usage and whatever, they would already have and that's something that considering we're getting near the summer, that would be quite good to have in place by the summer.

TMcK Facilitator: What are you thinking in terms of the timeframe? Soon?

Community Member 4: Four to six months, maybe? And then maybe come up with, find an innovative way of delivering that so it's like an app, a game or something you play online, something interactive rather than just a leaflet saying "save water" but I think if they're innovative with that education, it would reach not only a different range of audience but also age range as well, young to old, if it was a bit interactive that way.

TMcK Facilitator: So gamification of it, okay, fantastic. We can add that to the actions. Community Member 2, I think you were next?

Community Member 2: It's really to follow on with what's just been said, I think there's a massive opportunity here to, I think you heard "gamification" but I remember as a kid being encouraged to do things with an altruistic motive, whether or not we think back to what we did with Blue Peter when we were kids.

You could really push this through education, through schools, link it into water is such a scarce resource that we want to keep it. You could really push, you could really be like a standard bearer here or one of the first to get into education and really use that as a way

to encourage youngsters, even if the youngsters are the drivers of parents' behaviour. They could be the ones that are actually responsible for changing household behaviours because they're the ones that really see the challenge in it. Gamification, I like the idea of that. But just really I think the younger generation can be a lot more eco aware than we were.

TMcK Facilitator: So I can see the team adding that in, that's a great point, thank you. Community Member 3 and then I'll come to you Community Member 9, after.

Community Member 3: Just building on that, there might be an opportunity for a sponsorship of some kind of science project or environmental project that they could run a competition between schools. I remember years ago when I was at school, Stirling Health did something like that.

But the reason I put my hand up is I think that [1] and [5] have got a bit muddled, so I think the customer incentives are linked to the drive to reduce demand on water, not necessarily around increased visibility, although that could be part of promotion but as it was pointed out by Community Member 8, we don't get to choose our water provider. It's different, so with Octopus, they're bidding for us as customers because we can move between providers very easily. This is different, we can't but an incentive can still drive us to be more economical with our water use. So I just think those two need tidying up.

TMcK Facilitator: I think you're right there to highlight that.

Community Member 3: And I'd like to see something around incentives, water is scarce and it's becoming more urgent, so I'd like to see something launched from the next financial year, an incentive scheme.

TMcK Facilitator: So we're going to put a timeframe on that one, thank you.

Community Member 9: Just following on from what Community Member 2 said, I put a question in the chat because my microphone wasn't working, were there any potential plans to work with, for example, the Department for Education, to educate younger people about water waste? I think this could help tackle a futureproofing of water, if we and water companies work with schools and the Government, and I think that could be a potential strategy.

TMcK Facilitator: Great, I can see that being added in as we speak onto Number 4.

Community Member 8: Just two points, firstly building on what Community Member 3 was talking about in terms of financial incentives for saving water. Conversely, I think the way that things are heading, I know this is not going to be popular but what about punitive financial penalties for excessive water use? I think that could also be another avenue, I know it's not going to be popular but targeting the households that use the most amount of water because we need to drive a change in behaviour, it's just unsustainable at the moment, I feel.

The other aspect is I wanted to say was regarding letting us know how the company is going to be using new technologies to drive through the reduction of leakages. So I saw something with another water provider and I can't remember which one, but they're using fibre optic type cameras and really high end sophisticated technologies, where they can look through pipes without having to drill into them from above ground, but actually sending a robot or fibre optic cable to look and see where the leakages are. So I'd be interested to know what the company is doing in terms of actually using new technologies where there's AI, where there's robotics etc., to actually find those leakages, stop the leakages and prevent future leakages from occurring.

CCW Chair: Quick time check, Clare.

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, I was going to wrap up there, I can see that we're running out of space on our chart as well! I think we've got enough to be going on with here in terms of actions, thank you everyone for your builds and I'll hand back to Bev.

CCW Chair: Thank you. Adam and Steve, I think there are some actions here that may need some additional work by the team but is there anything here that stands out for you, that you can't commit to?

Adam Stephens: Another great set of, a good discussion to be part and it's one of those where actually you sit here thinking if we could all spend basically an evening in the pub, we'd talk to you for ages about all these different things you're so interested in. We are a company using fibre optics, the first one in the country to use fibre optics to detect leaks, so it could have been us that you were reading about, but it might not have had our name so prominently.

I think Action 1, there's been a lot of talk about incentives and actually, we're one of the pioneering companies in the sector looking at different tariff models. So there's one standard tariff model for the country but we've been doing extensive trialling on different tariff models that include incentives and we're hoping to roll that out more broadly. It's quite complicated because of the regulatory confines we're in but perhaps rather than picking up all those points, what we could do is take an action to bring you all into the loop on that tariff trial we're running, the benefit we see, we can see that it has a big impact on customers' usage and behaviour, we can see that it reduces their bills and it does a lot of the things that you've been picking away at. So I think we could just educate, you know, we could just provide some of the information to you which is public but we can point you towards that.

CCW Chair: So lots of good stuff going on, it's about how you get that out wider into your customer base. Steve, I'm sure you're itching to tell us more about the two amazing projects but I'm so sorry, we haven't got time for that. Is there any comment you'd like to make on the actions? Is there anything here that's absolute no-no for you?

Steve Plumb: No, it's absolutely fine, we can get onto all of those. And just a big thank you really for having people so engaged with helping us save water and to be able to supply water in the future, thank you for everything. As Adam says, it really warrants a much longer conversation over a pint.

CCW Chair: For the record, Clare, we have some work to shape, smarten those actions and timescales, but for the record we've now agreed the actions under the question so we're going to move on. I just want to say one point before we move onto the third question. Adam and Steve are going to stay with us for this question, it's going to be asked by Community Member 11, and then we give the company an opportunity to speak. When we come to having a discussion about raising questions, I would just like for us to be mindful of the tone. Adam and Steve, they will be transparent, if I think it's too complex, I will intervene on that. As a panel, if we can keep it a collaborative conversation, that would be great. So Community Member 11, over to you.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm just going to share the screen for you, Community Member 11.

Community Member 11: Thank you very much. Question 3 is trust and confidence in drinking water quality and hardness. We want to feel confident that the water coming into our homes every day is safe, high quality and something we can trust. Concerns about hard water, unpleasant taste and the need to rely on filters or bottled water can make that trust harder to maintain. This is not just about the water itself but about having clear information

that is easy to understand, so people feel reassured rather than confused by technical detail.

So my question is how will Affinity Water build customers' trust and confidence that the water coming from their taps is safe and good quality, and explain hard water and water quality in a way people can easily understand?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 11. Adam, you can decide who's going to answer first, again quite concise, we only have five minutes to respond to this one, so I'll have to stop you. Over to you, Adam.

Adam Stephens: That's fine, thank you again, Community Member 11, I can totally understand why you'd ask a question like this, so it's great to have an opportunity to talk about it. I guess what I would say before passing over to Steve, who's very much more an expert on these sort of things than I am, but what I can say is the water in our region and in the UK generally, has some of the highest standards of water quality in the world and I don't think that as a kind of industry, we really sing our praises too strongly on that front. So you can be assured that the water that comes out of your tap is some of the best, if not the best in the world, right? Our water is very safe. Steve, you've probably got a few stats that we can put to that as well.

Steve Plumb: Absolutely, so we take just over 31,000 samples every year and we do that right from where we take our water from, from the ground or from the river, all the way through our treatment works, all the way through our network and indeed, a huge proportion of customer taps, so we sample right from river to tap through the network. On that, we conduct over 190,000 individual tests and last year, we were 99.98% compliant, so we had 36 tests that didn't meet the standard and by far the majority of those were associated with a customer tap, so just to be clear on that, occasionally when we sample a customer tap and they've perhaps got a new tap, we will pick up nickel because it gets absorbed in the tap, if they've got lead plumbing, we might pick up some lead in it or if they've had the cat in the sink, we might pick up a bacti from it. So you know, the majority of those failures were associated with customer taps.

So as Adam says, very, very safe water. Now you've also mentioned about hardness, we have the privilege in our area of 60% of our water comes out of the chalk, it comes out of the chalk aquifer that sits below our feet, depending on where you are in the region, the other 40% comes directly out of the Thames. So you know, the groundwater is naturally very, very clean and we don't have to do very much at all to it. In some cases, we give it a whiff of chlorine and put it in supply, it's that high a quality. But it is hard because when it's in the ground, it absorbs the calcium carbonate and the manganese and some of the things that are naturally in the chalk and it absorbs that.

Many would say that is a health benefit because you are getting some of the minerals that you would buy when you buy bottled spring water, so it's not bad for you in any way. We can argue, we can have different opinions on taste and everybody likes their water where they live and nobody likes the water where somebody else lives, but it is hard and that can cause an issue in washing machines, etc. Now we do not often as a company and we leave that up to customer choice.

CCW Chair: I'm just going to jump in, one and a half minutes left. Can you answer the part of the question that talks about how will Affinity [Water] build customers' trust and confidence in a way that's easy for people to understand? Great stats but how will you get that out there?

Steve Plumb: I think that's a really good question, the way we approach that is we try and do a brilliant job, we publicise that and we can talk about where do we publish our water

quality data, etc., but I think the value of this forum is you tell us how you would like us, how can we build trust with you? Notwithstanding “we supply brilliant quality of water every day”, what else do we need to do above that? We’re clearly missing, the fact that you’re asking this question, Community Member 11, is we’re missing the point somewhere and what we’re doing, brilliant quality water is not enough, how could we convince you? How can we build trust with you? I’d really appreciate an answer on that or some help on that.

Adam Stephens: It’s an interesting one as well because if you think about the compliance statistics, which are we are 99.98% compliant on all samples, did 190,000 samples and the failures have all been at customers’ taps, in a way I suppose for us, we would want you guys to feel that the water is always there when you need it and always of good quality, and we are not often having to go out, thankfully and report that water is not good quality. So as Steve said, we publish those water quality metrics but because of the high compliance rate, we’ve probably never felt the need to go and bang the drum on that so loudly but as Steve said, I think it would be really interesting to hear how you would find that more engaging.

CCW Chair: Thanks, Adam. Okay, so Clare, really interesting, Affinity Water is saying they’re 99.9% compliant but yet the panel are asking a question around trust and confidence in water quality. A great opportunity here for the panel to share how they would like to hear more about the quality of the water in their regions, over to you.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Bev. So yes, would love to hear your response to this in terms of what was clear, was anything missing there for you in terms of that translation of water quality and how we’re building trust? What’s missing for you? What would you like to see in terms of actions developed around this one? Community Member 11, I’m going to go back to you, given that you asked the question and just ask you are you happy with that response or is there anything else you’d like to see?

Community Member 11: Yes, I am happy but there’s just maybe a few things I could ask questions about, like for example, where I live, the water’s very hard and I know obviously some areas have harder water than others, and I just wanted to sort of touch on more to what actually causes more hardness in some areas and what it is other countries don’t have, their water’s not as hard and what is it that’s so different within these other countries that their water is generally soft rather than hard?

TMcK Facilitator: They explained that they don’t soften the water and the hardness comes from the chalk, do you want that explained that in a bit more detail? What would you want to hear from them to give you that information?

Community Member 11: So I think moving on from that point then, just a question moving forward, is everything being done currently to prevent hardness? Is there anything that Affinity Water have spoken about in terms of in time at some point, is there anything that could potentially eliminate hardness from water, even to some degree or all together? Basically what I’m saying is will the water always be hard?

TMcK Facilitator: Is there a particular issue? Is it the taste or what is it about the hardness?

Community Member 11: I personally see every day, it’s not so much the taste, when water is hard, you can distinctively very clearly see the difference in the colour of the water and obviously, the clearer water is, you’re more inclined to drink.

TMcK Facilitator: So do you want some assurance around the colouration of water? Where that comes from? That it’s safe to drink?

Community Member 11: No, I don’t have any questions or disputes in any shape or form that it’s not safe, I’m very confident the water is safe. It’s more a sort of a generalised

question in terms of what is it in other countries that the water's soft, but it's very hard in the UK? I think my punch questions are: what is it in the UK that makes water hard rather than soft and in time, moving forward, is this something that could be potentially eradicated or will the UK always have hard water? I think that's just really my two questions.

TMcK Facilitator: And the regional variations as well.

Community Member 11: Yes.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 5, did you have anything to jump on here?

Community Member 5: I was very surprised when we were doing the Water Voice and one of the questions was about drinking tap water. I've grown up drinking tap water, I've always drunk the tap water, but there was quite a high proportion of people that didn't.

Thinking about how the question was answered, I would still like reassurance, I know they've said that there is a very high percentage of the water is safe, however as a consumer, what guidance are they going to provide us with so that for example, if we did notice an odour or whatever, would we know what to do in terms of do we drink it? Don't we drink it? Should we call them? I wonder whether there's a little bit of work there to be done, just to reassure us that if there were a problem, what should we as the customer do?

Community Member 1: I'm in Essex and the water is very, very hard, the taste from the tap isn't great and they are brand new-ish taps, so maybe nickel or whatever Steve was mentioning earlier. But I'm presuming it's the cost to actually soften the water which is why you guys as a company don't do it?

TMcK Facilitator: So we want some understanding around the potential for it and the barriers to ...?

Community Member 1: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2?

Community Member 2: I live in an area where my reading is over 300 so I'm really, really hard water here. Now I have no issues with the fact that I live where I live and you can't change the geology of the country, but what I think might be something that they could consider is could you guys give us advice as to what we can do to mitigate that? I buy Britta capsules, I have a water softener, I have no idea if that's actually going to make that much of a difference so if the experts in this could start pushing out information about what we can do to mitigate that, that would be really, really good.

The other thing is the honesty around the education, you can't change the hardness of the water, you can't change the geology but can you do something that gives us [a] the fact that there's nothing wrong with it, be really clear about the fact that your water testing shows that it's safe? The drinking taste is what it is, if it gets cloudy, it's because of what's in it that nature provides and maybe just a little bit more education around mitigation of what we have to live with.

TMcK Facilitator: So education and clarity around that, brilliant, thank you. Community Member 3, have you got anything to add?

Community Member 3: Pretty much what everyone's said, for me this all goes back to the way you interact with the customer. I know that I don't go to the Affinity [Water] website weekly, monthly, probably once a year, if that because it's not a website I think about going to. But I think like Octopus has an app, lots of people have apps, I think this information, I think it's great that our water is some of the best in the country but I didn't know that until

you told us that, but I wouldn't necessarily go onto your website to look for that. So I think it's about, a lot of these have all got a common theme about how to engage with customers in the modern world, so it's not just on a website that I'm not going to go to look at because I don't have a need to, it's about how you, different ways of sharing and interacting with your customers to promote this. Because it is reassuring, I didn't know that and I don't personally have an issue with my tap water but to hear those stats is reassuring and I think that message should be out there, rather than just relying on people to "Look on our website", I think would boost customer confidence.

TMcK Facilitator: How would you want them to communicate with you? How would you want to engage? How is it best to engage with you?

Community Member 3: Obviously, there's so many platforms these days, obviously you've got social media, apps and I think an app is the way forward for a lot of people, certainly millennials, not only for monitoring your account but sharing information, reporting leaks. I think technology is the way to go but also maybe just putting a leaflet in with your bill, if you're still going to do paper bills. Rather than just a lot of text, make it easy to follow and understand, sort of interactive in a way if you like, send out a customer survey, see what customers are thinking about water quality and then responding to that survey with the stats, saying "Customer have said X but this is actually what the results show."

TMcK Facilitator: Does anyone else agree with Community Member 3 in terms of communication and app development? Lots of nodding here in agreement. Any other further points on that before we move onto another point on how they should best communicate with you? Community Member 3, was that the point you were going to raise or was it a separate point?

Community Member 3: No, it was a point linked to what Community Member 5 was saying about reassurance about what to do if you think there's an issue with your tap water. I was just wondering about those poor people that were in that very small percentage, whose water didn't pass muster, did Affinity [Water] communicate with them and support them? Or was it just an independent survey that they didn't even know that their water was being tested? Because obviously, it would be good if Affinity [Water] could state, "If we find there's something not quite right with your water, we'll support you to rectify it." And I don't mean that means they've got to commit to doing new taps or anything like that but at least identifying what the issue is.

TMcK Facilitator: Did you have a point on the communication, Community Member 6, or was that separate?

Community Member 6: It was on the communication one from Community Member 3. Sorry to have such an opposing opinion, but I think for me, I don't think water is ever something I'm going to actively engage with I guess because like people have said, we don't get a choice so you're almost not as active. For me, I almost need the water company to be proactive to communicate with me, for example, that letter came through yesterday and straightaway I read it and wanted to know what it was about. So for me, it's really that proactive communication with me as a user and I know we can't choose our supplier but to an extent, we do choose where we live and I know people who genuinely aren't loyal to areas who have moved because it is such a hard water area, because of the effects of their hair and things like that, when they've not been pressured.

So there is a choice to an extent, so I think it's really important to have that proactive communication from them, instead of us having to do something to find it.

TMcK Facilitator: For you, a letter or a leaflet with your bill, something like that is the best way for you to receive that?

Community Member 6: Yeah, and I'm a Millennial, possibly even Gen Z, on the border but for me, I need something I can physically see.

TMcK Facilitator: Does everyone agree with that point? Or is anyone verging towards the app which is much more under your control? How do people feel about that?

Community Member 7: I don't use apps, I don't like apps, maybe it's because I'm older, I don't like fiddling around with them and they're pushing you the whole time, you know, "Do this on an app, open a bank account on an app, do everything on an app, communicate with somebody on Sky television on an app", and I can't be bothered, it's too small, it's too fiddly and I don't want to, I'd rather pick up the phone and talk to somebody. I don't like all this app stuff but that's probably my age.

Community Member 12: I agree, it slows your phone down if you've got too many. I always think the more you put on, it slows your phone down and my husband is like that as well.

TMcK Facilitator: So getting the newsletter and leaflet through the door, are you on that side on that one?

Community Member 12: We haven't had anything apart from the bill, the last bill, we haven't had anything from Affinity Water, no. I can't recall anything coming in the door, nothing at all.

TMcK Facilitator: Would that be something you're interested in, the type of information we're talking about?

Community Member 12: Yes, definitely, definitely interesting, yeah, I agree.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to take a couple more points to raise, Community Member 3 first and then I'll go to Community Member 5 and then we'll close the session.

Community Member 3: I feel fairly positive towards the app, we do have too many apps but I think as obviously your water provider is fairly constant, then it would be worth downloading an app. I really think that we need to be moving away from paper communications, whilst I appreciate there is a significant sort of group of people, my dad's 95 and he still holds onto paper and things like that, but I just think we've got to start somewhere with that and quite often, he might want it in paper but then it goes straight in the bin, he doesn't even look at it. So I'm thinking if not apps, what about emails?

TMcK Facilitator: That's a good build, thanks Community Member 3. And finally, Community Member 5, did you have anything else to add?

Community Member 5: It was just to comment on the apps and just how I am feeling the overwhelm really in terms of the digital presence in my life, and I'm feeling now I want to step back. Don't necessarily want the paper, possibly an email but this, I don't want to be bombarded, there's nothing worse than the companies that send you an email every day, it's just not what we need. Measured.

TMcK Facilitator: It's hard to get right, communication, we can understand there's a real challenge there but some great perspectives which is really helpful. I'm going to share my screen to talk about some of the actions we've captured.

The first one was around explain reasons for regional hard water and variations within the region, in clear, everyday language and outline current water hardness reduction measures. So, explaining the barriers to using water softening techniques and advising what customers can do to mitigate their water hardness, so providing a bit of clarity and education around that.

Number 2, around further reassurance on water safety, outlining the available guidance around water safety and support provided to customers whose households didn't meet the safety standards.

Number 3, to expand water quality and safety communications beyond the website. We just talked about that, using a diverse set of communication channels, both online tools, social media, emails and non-digital tools like leaflets through the door with your bills and potential to create an app. The careful balance of being proactive in communication but not feeling that you're going to be overwhelmed, so that balance that we've talked about.

I am going to throw that back out to everybody there and to see how we feel about these actions, is there anything you would like clarified? Or would we like to build on any of them, or put a timeframe on any of these actions to be developed? Are we happy with these?

Community Member 2: I think Community Member 6 said something that's really important. It's going to be a reversal, the company has to come to us because we have no choice, we're not shopping for a bargain, we're not looking to change our provider so yes, I think in some respects, without being overwhelmed but all the good information that you're talking about, we're probably not going to go as proactively to look for it because it doesn't really make any difference to us, we can't go to anyone else. But it's a massive incentive for you to push that information out, so people don't think their water's rubbish, their water is what it is, it's clean, it's safe but they need to be told that rather than go and find that.

TMcK Facilitator: That's a good build, thank you.

Community Member 6: Just to add and considering what we've heard from everyone, there's never going to be a communication method that suits everyone, so actually how can we choose if we want that reactive or that more proactive communication? So is there an app for some and is there the option to have that communication from them directly? How can we as the consumers have that choice? Some people wouldn't want to be bombarded but actually, I would want every letter because it would mean I read it, an email I probably would read in the same way as a letter if I'm honest, but having to actively go and search on an app wouldn't be for me, but for others, it sounds like it would. In comparison to me, whereas the app suited me previously to find out my water usage, it just wouldn't in this circumstance, I would say, so it would be good to have those options available.

TMcK Facilitator: That's a good build there on capturing communication preferences from your customers, so there can be an action defined around that. I see lots of nodding on that one as well. Any last thoughts there? It's getting late now! If there isn't any other changes there, I'm going to hand back to Bev.

CCW Chair: Thank you. Community Member 6, I think that's a great point, I'd written down while I was listening to you talking, multi-generational appropriate communications, what are those preferences? That's a great point that you've just made. Adam and Steve, Adam I'll come to you first. What are your thoughts on the actions that have been captured for this question? Anything that you think you can't commit to?

Adam Stephens: No, you guys have been a really great panel and I think both the quality of the conversation has been really strong, the quality of the actions has been great and it's been a lively debate where, as Steve said, we could spend a long time talking about all of these topics.

I think all three of those actions look very deliverable. I think the third one⁴, if you were going to finesse it afterwards, I think we do emails, as in you can have your bill by email, you can have your communication by email, we are developing an app, it is coming out in the next couple of months, we do do paper, we do social, etc, and I think actually, if we wrap that all up into maybe two points, which would be: so what are all the different communication channels and how do you choose between them? And we could bring that to life more because what you're asking for, I think we can say we can deliver all that, but clearly what we've missed is giving you the understanding of how to choose those things.

We obviously try and strike a very fine balance in communication between, as you've discussed, sort of bombarding and not bombarding and it definitely comes from a good place where we see ourselves as providing you a 24/7 high-quality water service that in some ways, we would hope you wouldn't need to contact us about but I think Community Member 2's point is we can possibly be more proactive in pushing some of those good news stories out, so that we can build confidence and trust.

CCW Chair: I think one of the most powerful things I've heard tonight is that you're almost silent to the customers and yet there's all of this great work going on. Community Member 5 mentioned it's like you're obviously invisible, so it's how do you take that and move forward with this work that you're doing in a way that is meaningful for the customers. There's a theme here to these questions that's coming through around comms, which is something to think about.

Steve, I know you posed a question back to the panel about what they want and that generated a good discussion. Any final thoughts from you, anything on here that you don't feel can be delivered?

Steve Plumb: No, not at all, just the last thing from me is for that very small number of customers who have a failing sample that's associated with their tap, we will work with them to sort it out and we won't leave them alone until it's sorted. So whether we're at fault because it's our treatment works or whether it's the customer's tap, we will work with you to make sure that's sorted and get you back in a place where you get brilliant quality water.

CCW Chair: Great, I think Community Member 3 raised a point on that of concern, so thank you, Steve, for that. For the record then, we've now agreed the actions under this question, it's a little bit of work to be doing across all three of the questions post this session this evening, just to refine, make sure they're SMART, agree timescales as well but all that leaves me to do is to say a huge thank you to everyone for this evening, we've covered a number of really important themes, we've agreed a set of actions in response to the issues raised by customers and there will be that pre-work on those. We've captured those actions live during the session and they will form the basis, the final version will inform the basis of the company's formal response, so any changes to these actions will be in discussion with the panel and also with the company as well.

In terms of next steps, a full transcript of this session is going to be published on our Consumer Council for Water website, within five working days. Before publication, that early draft will be shared with you all so you can review and raise any comments. A plain English summary will be published within 10 working days and Affinity Water will be required to publish its action plans within 28 [working] days, setting out how it will deliver the commitments that have been agreed tonight.

We will monitor the progress and report publicly on the delivery of each of the actions and as I said at the outset, this process is designed to ensure transparency and follow-up on

⁴ Expand water quality and safety communications beyond the website

agreed actions, it's not just about having good discussions, it's about making really positive change.

Finally, I just want to say a huge thank you to you all. Adam, to you and the Affinity [Water] team, thank you for the transparency and honesty that you've all brought to the discussions tonight, I really appreciate that, and a big thank you to the panel, I think you've been amazing, you were incredible to work with in the briefing session and you've made me feel really proud tonight as the Chair; the questions that you shaped are great questions to have put to the senior team at Affinity [Water]. Your input is what gives this process credibility and purpose. And on that note, I'd like to say thank you all and have a good rest of the evening.

[CLOSE]

CCW

The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

23 Stephenson Street,
Birmingham, B2 4BH

Ccw.org.uk
Follow us: **@CCWvoice**