



The voice for water consumers  
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# Water Voice - Accountability Session

## Summary report

**Water company:** Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water

**Accountability Session date:** 13.04.26

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie  
Research & Energy Saving Trust

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# Questions created and asked by community members



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Community members identified three **priority questions** they wanted to put directly to Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water during the Accountability Session.

The questions were developed through a structured process involving the full Water Voice community (c.50 members). In January and February 2026, members collectively identified and refined priority themes through Spotlight surveys. These priorities were then shaped into draft questions during a dedicated briefing session, before being finalised and formally put to Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water<sup>1</sup> at the Accountability Session.

Each question was led by a community member and explored in depth during the session. Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water provided on-the-record responses, with commitments and actions discussed in real time.

	Topic	Community member question
Q1	Value for money, rising bills and visible investment	<p><i>“As customers, we can accept that bills may go up, but what is missing is a clear and visible explanation of what we are getting back for that money. The real frustration is being asked to pay more while still not knowing where the money is going, what it is funding, and what has actually improved as a result. It is not enough for that information to sit somewhere on a website — people want clear evidence of what is being delivered in return.</i></p> <p><b>How will you clearly show customers that rising bills are fair and justified, where our money is actually going, and what real improvements you are delivering for customers in return?”</b></p>
Q2	Pollution prevention and environmental protection	<p><i>“I live near the River South Tyne, where upstream there is great salmon fishing, but a few miles further down there are what feel like constant reports of contamination. That makes this issue feel very real and very close to home. Customers are worried that pollution is still happening at these levels, that the damage to rivers and local communities is continuing, and that there is still not enough confidence that the problem is being fixed quickly enough.</i></p> <p><b>What will you do now to reduce sewage pollution and storm overflow discharges, what stretching targets and timescales will you commit to, and how will you be held accountable if those reductions are not delivered?”</b></p>
Q3	Dividends, executive pay and accountability	<p><i>“Dividends, executive pay and bonuses are a real concern for customers at a time when bills are rising and there are still clear questions about whether enough is being invested in the service. Recent decisions not to pay a dividend may show that these choices can change, but customers still want to understand the wider standards behind them — both how these decisions are made now and how they will be approached in future.</i></p> <p><b>How can you justify dividends, executive pay and bonuses when customers are paying more but still have concerns about underinvestment, and what standards need to be met before those decisions are justified?”</b></p>

The sections that follow set out each question in turn, alongside the actions discussed and the expectations community members have for delivery through the company’s published action plan. This will be published on **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2026**.

<sup>1</sup> This session covered Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water (Northumbrian Water Limited) - referred to in this report as ‘Northumbrian Water Limited’ for the purposes of brevity and formality.

# Executive summary - insights by question



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The Accountability Session for Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water highlighted a consistent ask for clearer, more accessible information, stronger transparency, and more proactive communication that shows how money is used, how performance is improving, and how decisions are being made.

## Q1.

### Value for money, rising bills and visible investment

Northumbrian Water Limited said higher bills are communicated via bills inserts, website content, QR links, pie charts and local engagement, with current investment focused on water resources in Essex & Suffolk and river quality and storm overflows in the North East.

Customers accepted some positive service experiences and, in some cases, still saw water as good value, but many felt the explanation remained too generic and too reliant on customers finding information themselves.

They wanted clearer local examples, named projects, visible improvements and simpler explanations of what higher bills are funding and when customers will see the benefits.

Customers want clearer, simpler explanations of what higher bills are funding and what improvements they will deliver.

## Q2.

### Pollution prevention and environmental protection

Northumbrian Water Limited outlined a major pollution and storm overflows reducing program, including smart sewer work, added storage, pipe relining, water quality monitoring and £1bn storm overflow investment, alongside spill and pollution reduction targets.

Customers welcomed the scale of ambition, and some found it reassuring, but many felt it was too general and did not give enough accessible detail on local impacts, spill data or overall accountability.

They wanted clearer evidence that pollution is genuinely reducing, easier-to-find progress information, and more transparent reporting on targets, terminology and local outcomes.

Customers want clearer evidence, clearer language and clearer accountability that pollution is genuinely reducing.

## Q3.

### Dividends, executive pay and accountability

Northumbrian Water Limited said dividends and executive rewards are governed through a regulated framework, published policies, customer-linked targets and board oversight, and explained investors fund upfront investment.

Some customers found parts of that explanation helpful, particularly the regulator's role, but the issue still carried strong mistrust and felt too technical and inaccessible.

The discussion therefore centred on the need for simpler explanations, more transparent reporting, and clearer proof that customer outcomes, service and investment come before rewards..

Customers want clearer rules on rewards and stronger proof that customers and investment come first.

# Actions agreed during the Accountability Session



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## Q1.

### Value for money, rising bills and visible investment

- Provide clearer, plain-English explanations of what higher bills are funding and why.
- Show clearer local examples of investment, including postcode-level or area-level projects.
- Give customers direct updates through bills, newsletters or e-updates, not just website links.
- Show visible outcomes, timelines and local benefits from investment more clearly.

## Q2.

### Pollution prevention and environmental protection

- Publish clearer year-on-year data on spills, pollution incidents and progress against targets.
- Explain pollution, spill and storm overflow terminology in plain English, including what counts as serious pollution.
- Improve signposting and regular updates so customers can easily find pollution and performance information.
- Show how investment and local action are reducing incidents in practice, especially in priority areas.

## Q3.

### Dividends, executive pay and accountability

- Explain more clearly how dividends, executive pay and bonuses are governed and overseen.
- Set out the standards and customer outcomes that must be met before rewards are justified.
- Publish a simpler annual summary showing what was paid, what targets were met or missed, and why.
- Provide clearer evidence that customer outcomes and investment are prioritised before rewards.



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# Water Voice - Accountability Session

## Summary report

# Our findings in detail

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# Q1. Value for money, rising bills and visible investment

Clear evidence that higher bills are delivering tangible local improvements



Question asked by Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water community member:

*“As customers, we can accept that bills may go up, but what is missing is a clear and visible explanation of what we are getting back for that money. The real frustration is being asked to pay more while still not knowing where the money is going, what it is funding, and what has actually improved as a result. It is not enough for that information to sit somewhere on a website — people want clear evidence of what is being delivered in return.*”

*How will you clearly show customers that rising bills are fair and justified, where our money is actually going, and what real improvements you are delivering for customers in return?”*

During the session, Northumbrian Water Limited said it already explains bills through bill inserts and pie charts, website content, QR links to local projects and community engagement, and said current investment is focused on future water resources in Essex and Suffolk and river quality and storm overflows in the North East.

Community members acknowledged some positive service experiences and often still saw water as good value, but many felt the explanation remained too reliant on websites, QR codes and broad assurances, without clearly showing what higher bills would fund locally or what customers would see in return.

The discussion therefore centred on the need for clearer, more direct and more local communication linking rising bills to named projects, visible improvements, clear timescales and stronger evidence of value for money.

## Actions

- **Provide postcode-specific bill updates** showing 5–6 named local projects, what each will deliver, and a QR link to fuller area-level detail.
- **Explain bill increases in plain English** by linking them to named investment priorities and outcomes, not generic references to inflation or rising costs.
- **Send regular direct updates** by bills, newsletters and other non-digital channels, communicating projects under way, projects starting within six months, and key next steps.
- **Show visible evidence of delivery** through named local schemes and positive investment stories, including clear timelines showing when customers will see change

*“It’s very hard for me to get excited about what you’re doing and thinking positively about you, if you’re not expressing that well to me.”*

*“I want to hear about the infrastructure investment... the projects which are going to make a difference to the planet and are going to secure water supplies for the future, for myself and my offspring”*



Customers felt explanations of rising bills remained too generic, with a need for clearer local evidence of what higher charges will deliver and by when.

# Q1. Value for money, rising bills and visible investment



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"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Water company response on the night)	What is the 'Ideal' water company response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale / final comments
Provide <b>postcode-level examples</b> of where customer money is being invested, with clear links to local area projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that customers can see where money goes through pie charts, bill inserts, the website, a new QR code on bills linking to local projects, and at 'Local Action' engagement events.</li> <li>Bill inserts provide short summaries of some of the 800 investment projects in-action.</li> <li>Customers can email the team for project specifics</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will improve clarity surrounding local project investment, and expand communicating methods i.e. better utilise social media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show postcode or area-level examples of investment on bills</li> <li>Provide 5-6 named local projects or activities customers can recognise.</li> <li>State what each project is for, what it will improve, and who will benefit locally.</li> <li>Include QR codes for extra detail, not as the main explanation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most information already on bills and website but will improve and expand on current communication methods</li> <li>Will explore giving postcode-level information on local investment and projects, as feature exists for another service</li> </ul>
Explain <b>bill increases in plain English</b> , showing what they fund and why they're needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that affordability and value for money are considered during planning, with current investment focused on water resources in Essex and Suffolk and river quality / storm overflows in the North East.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company says existing communication sets this out, but accepts more clarity is needed. has accepted the need to bring this "big picture" explanation more clearly to the forefront.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain bill rises in plain English, avoiding generic cost references or vague terms (unless linked to specific outcomes)</li> <li>Clarify how investment is prioritised, and state which priorities higher bills are funding</li> <li>Explain why these priorities matter for customers and the environment.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Achievable within the short term. Timescale detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement of the need to bring "big picture" explanations of bill increases to the fore. Will figure out the clearest, most engaging ways to do so.</li> </ul>
Send <b>direct updates</b> through bills, newsletters and other <b>non-digital channels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company said information is already shared through bills, the website, social media and community visits, and that customers can email them for more project details.</li> <li>Company tries to reach people through multiple channels as recognises some customers don't use the website. Customer panels are run to identify how best to reach diverse customers pools, whilst partner collaborations used to reach offline customers.</li> </ul> <p><b>No future plan discussed at the session.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide direct updates across digital and non-digital channels; i.e. bill inserts, post, e-newsletters</li> <li>Regular highlights of current and upcoming work, with advanced notice before major works begin</li> <li>Make updates usable for offline or non-digitally confident customers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Monthly or quarterly highlights suggested. No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> 6 months advanced notice of project commencement proposed. Company already provides this, so point is null and void.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liked newsletter or e-letter format; will heavily consider. Will discuss the best communication approach. Open to new or improved formats.</li> <li>Reassurance advanced notice is provided for local works</li> </ul>
Show <b>visible evidence</b> of delivery with named local schemes, with clear progress timelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company said local project headlines and associated spend can be found online.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current big-scale focuses are on major water-resource work in Suffolk, past reservoir investment in Essex, and wider environmental and carbon-reduction activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show what customers should expect to see from paying more, with visible local examples of investment</li> <li>Publicise positive investment stories proactively</li> <li>Include clear milestones, dates and timelines for projects, using a dynamic bar-graph visual</li> <li>Link improvements to specific service areas, such as water infrastructure upgrades or sustainability actions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Short term suggested for publishing positive news. No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepted the need for more visible, positive communication. Will work to deliver this quickly.</li> <li>Will work on clarifying what bill increases fund locally</li> </ul>

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

## Q2. Pollution prevention and environmental protection

Clearer evidence of pollution reduction



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Question asked by Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water community member:

*"I live near the River South Tyne, where upstream there is great salmon fishing, but a few miles further down there are what feel like constant reports of contamination. That makes this issue feel very real and very close to home. Customers are worried that pollution is still happening at these levels, that the damage to rivers and local communities is continuing, and that there is still not enough confidence that the problem is being fixed quickly enough.*

*What will you do now to reduce sewage pollution and storm overflow discharges, what stretching targets and timescales will you commit to, and how will you be held accountable if those reductions are not delivered?"*

Northumbrian Water Limited said it had already begun a major sewage pollution and storm overflows reduction program, involving smart sewer work, added storage, pipe relining and £1bn of investment. It said spills fell 31% from 2024 - 2025, that it is targeting 14.3 spills per overflow by the end of the five-year period, with progress tracked through regulator oversight and annual reporting.

Community members welcomed the ambition but felt the response was too general, with too little accessible detail on local impacts, spill numbers, contaminants, definitions and progress tracking measures.

Discussion therefore focused on the need for clearer local evidence, easier-to-find data and more visible accountability of whether pollution is reducing.

### Actions

- Publish specific, comparable data on spills, pollution incidents, contaminants and yearly progress against reduction targets.
- Explain storm overflow and pollution terminology in plain English, including what counts as serious pollution.
- Provide regular, easy-to-find updates on targets, progress and accountability, with clearer signposting to existing information.
- Show how prevention investment is reducing incidents in priority local areas, with clear links to monitoring and outcomes.

*"I think absolute clarity to build confidence for us is really important, in relation to pollution"*

*"If there are repeat problems in one area and prioritising that and telling us how that's going to be addressed would be really important"*



Customers welcomed the ambition and investment, but wanted clearer local evidence, plain-English explanations and more visible accountability that pollution is genuinely reducing.

## Q2. Pollution prevention and environmental protection



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"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Water company response on the night)	What is the 'Ideal' water company response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale/ final comments
Publish <b>specific, comparable data</b> on spills, pollution incidents and yearly progress against reduction targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company said there is an active sewage spill reduction program. Achievements include a 31% spill reduction from 2024 - 2025; a 17.8 spills per overflow target achieved (against the 2025 target of 19.6 spills) and a current-year target of 18.3 spills per overflow</li> <li>No Category 1 serious pollution incidents in recent years. Had lowest national pollution levels in 2025.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future stretching targets: 14.3 spills per overflow over next 5 years, 10 spills per overflow by 2030. Continuation of no Category 1 incidents.</li> <li>Will continue publishing information annually through its 'Pollution Incident Reduction plan' and wider reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish specific spill and pollution data in an accessible document, detailing location, size and incident cause.</li> <li>Commit to publishing all 'non-serious pollution incidents (Category 3 and 4) with customers.</li> <li>Publish year-on-year pollution data so customers can see past performance, current performance and future targets side by side. Clearly state if pollution has reduced for the current year.</li> <li>Include clearer information on major contaminants detected in waterways, and their environmental effects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This information is already published in the annual 'Pollution Incident Reduction plan'.</li> <li>Spills published within one hour of incident on the website 'spill tracker'. However, new communication forms will be discussed.</li> <li>Will try and communicate this information in a more accessible and easy to read format e.g. a visual document</li> </ul>
Explain <b>storm overflow and pollution terminology in plain English</b> , including defining 'serious pollution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that the Environment Agency categorises pollution incidents; Category 1 and 2 are serious, Category 3 and 4 are minor. Clarified that some storm overflow events are compliant spills rather than pollution events, and that not all river pollution sources (contaminants) fall within company responsibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spending £1bn reducing storm overflows across their waste treatment sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define serious pollution, minor pollution, compliant spill and related terms in plain English.</li> <li>Clarify the difference between storm overflow operation and pollution incidents.</li> <li>Explain what Northumbrian Water is and is not responsible for, including around contaminants</li> <li>Publish water treatment test results in everyday language – including contaminants found and what is tested for.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will share Environmental Agency's 'Serious pollution' criteria with customers.</li> <li>Accepted giving clearer pollution explanations.</li> <li>Installing continuous water quality monitors over next 10 years</li> <li>Further detail expected in company action plan</li> </ul>
Provide <b>regular, easy-to-find updates</b> on targets, progress and accountability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that spills are shown on an online 'spill tracker' map within one hour, that the company self-reports over 90% of incidents (the highest out of any company, and performance is reported through the business plan and annual publications.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will maintain yearly publication of progress with the Annual Report and 'Pollution Incident Reduction Plan'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular plain-English updates on storm overflows, pollution performance and target delivery.</li> <li>Make the spill tracker and pollution reduction information easier to find and understand – create a newsletter and avoid jargon inside.</li> <li>Show how often progress will be reported and what happens if targets are missed.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like the newsletter idea. Will consider.</li> <li>Will try to provide clearer signposting to existing information on the topic and discuss new communication methods</li> </ul>
Show how prevention investment is <b>reducing incidents in priority local areas</b> , with clear links to monitoring and outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The company said</b> early shareholder funding of £400m supported smart sewer work and wider prevention activity; highlighted Newcastle smart sewer work and extra water storage added, pipe relining and surface water removal. Said, with 239 overflows targeted to below 10 spills in this period, and continuous water quality monitors are being installed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding smart sewer system to Redcar and Marske. Installing battery power assets in North East for energy relief during power cuts.</li> <li>Of its 1,500 storm overflows, Northumbrian Water said 239 will be reduced to fewer than 10 spills per overflow in this five-year period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show how major investment is reducing incidents in practice</li> <li>Prioritise and explain action in repeat problem areas affecting rivers and communities.</li> <li>Link each major scheme to expected local impact, target reductions and timescales.</li> <li>Use monitoring and reporting to show whether prevention work is delivering measurable improvement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No firm timescales, other than 5 year timescales for stretching targets.</p> <p><b>Final comments from Water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed to improvement communication. Will discuss and detail best format to do this in the company action plan.</li> </ul>

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

## Q3. Dividends, executive pay and accountability

Transparency on company dividends and exec pay



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Question asked by Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water community member:

*“Dividends, executive pay and bonuses are a real concern for customers at a time when bills are rising and there are still clear questions about whether enough is being invested in the service. Recent decisions not to pay a dividend may show that these choices can change, but customers still want to understand the wider standards behind them — both how these decisions are made now and how they will be approached in future.*

*How can you justify dividends, executive pay and bonuses when customers are paying more but still have concerns about underinvestment, and what standards need to be met before those decisions are justified?”*

Northumbrian Water Limited said dividends, executive pay and bonuses are governed by a regulated framework, with investor returns set through a published dividend policy and executive rewards linked to stretching targets. It also said investors help fund upfront investment, that planned spending has been delivered, and that bonus measures reflect customer priorities.

Community members welcomed some of that explanation, but said mistrust remains high and the framework still feels too technical. Therefore, the discussion focused on clearer standards, clearer decisions and stronger evidence that customer outcomes and investment come before reward.

### Actions

- **Publish a plain-English guide** explaining how bills, investor funding, regulator oversight and the dividend policy shape decisions on dividends and executive reward.
- **Clearly explain the standards and customer outcomes** that must be met before dividends, bonuses and executive pay are justified, and show how those standards were applied in recent decisions.
- **Issue a simple annual summary** showing what was paid, which targets were met or missed, and how this affected dividends, bonuses and executive pay.
- **Publish year-on-year investment, dividend and performance data**, and explain how independent directors protect customer interests in these decisions.

*“It comes back to black and white communication... ‘Targets were X, achievements were Y, it’s positive/negative and therefore this is what the outcome of salaries, dividends and returns are.’ ”*

*“When people see private companies coming in on a fundamental natural resource...they have concerns... So anything they can do to increase transparency, reassure people, demonstrate they’re delivering for the people rather than for themselves, is really important,*



Customers want simpler explanations of how rewards are governed, and clearer proof that customer outcomes and investment come first.



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## Q3. Dividends, executive pay and accountability

"You said" (Community member actions)	"We did" (Water company response on the night)	What is the 'Ideal' water company response? (In the eyes of our community)	Timescale / final comments
Explain how dividends and executive rewards are <b>granted in plain English</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that dividends and executive reward sit within a regulated framework, with spending plans approved by the regulator, a published 'Dividend policy', and bonus targets set out in the Annual Performance Report</li> </ul> <p><b>Future plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will commit to making the 'Dividend Policy' and Annual Performance report easier to read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish a plain-English guide to how dividends, executive pay and bonuses are decided.</li> <li>Explain the role of customer bills, investor funding, regulator oversight and the dividend policy.</li> <li>Show clearly that decisions are made within a set framework, not on an arbitrary basis.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepted this as a <b>communication issue</b> and will continue discussing how to make existing information easier to understand.</li> </ul>
Show the <b>standards</b> behind financial rewards and bonuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company said awarding of dividends depend on company performance, financial resilience and regulatory allowances, and that executive targets are stretching and linked to customer priorities. Bonus targets are derived from ongoing customer research.</li> </ul> <p><b>No future plans discussed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly explain (in laymen terms) the standards and outcomes that must be met before dividends, bonuses and executive pay are justified.</li> <li>Show how those standards were applied in recent decisions, including non-payment of dividends. Commit to not altering standards following a non-payment of a dividend.</li> <li>Explain how customer priorities are reflected in reward decisions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reassurance that dividend policies are not altered following a non-payment, as outlined in the 'Dividend Policy'</li> <li>Further detail expected through the company action plan</li> </ul>
Prove <b>customers come before rewards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained they have delivered, and in recent years exceeded, planned spend; investor returns are adjusted up or down depending on customer performance and spending outcomes. Said the board has a majority of independent, non-water-industry directors to provide balance.</li> </ul> <p><b>No future plans discussed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show that investment, service and environmental outcomes come before reward.</li> <li>Publish comparative information on investment, performance and dividends over time.</li> <li>Explain how independent directors help safeguard customer interests.</li> <li>Provide clearer reassurance that decisions are being made for customers, not just shareholders.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> No timescale committed - detail expected in company action plan.</p> <p><b>Final comments from water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Company agreed to improve transparency and explanation of rewards. No change to decision-making structure however.</li> </ul>
Publish an <b>accessible annual summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The company explained that relevant information is already available through the annual report, Annual Performance Report, 'Dividend policy' and company accounts</li> </ul> <p><b>No future plans discussed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue a <b>simple annual summary</b> showing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>what was paid</li> <li>which targets were met or missed</li> <li>how this affected dividends, bonuses and executive pay</li> <li>how current performance compares with previous years</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Use <b>visuals and everyday language</b>, not technical reporting only.</p>	<p><b>Timescale:</b> Within the next 6 months</p> <p><b>Final comments from water company:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed to make information in existing documents easier to follow and more accessible, in line with the simple annual summary.</li> </ul>

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

# What happens after the Accountability Session?

After the Accountability Session, there is a clear and structured follow-up process.



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## Publication and transparency

### Within 5 working days

A full (anonymised) transcript of the session was [published](#) on **Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April**



## Action plan

### Within 28 days

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

The action plan will be **shared with the Water Voice community on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May**



## Customer feedback

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

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

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

### Within 10 working days

A plain-English summary is published, setting out:

The questions asked.

The key points raised by Community members.

The actions agreed for inclusion in the action plan.

Anything recorded as *not yet agreed*.

**Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April**



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# Water Voice - Accountability Session

## Summary report

# Annex: Research approach

Delivered by Taylor McKenzie  
Research & Energy Saving Trust

[ccw.org.uk](http://ccw.org.uk)

# Background



## What is an Accountability Session?

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

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

## Why do they exist?

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

For years, customers have felt that water companies weren't listening closely enough. *Water (Special Measures) Act 2025\** requiring a relevant undertaker to have arrangements in place for involving consumers in decisions of the undertaker that are likely to have a material impact on consumer matters.

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

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

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

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

# Objectives

What the session aims to achieve



## 1. Give customers a real voice

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 4. Build trust through transparency

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

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

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

## Outputs

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

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

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

# Methodology

How does it work?

CCW

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01



## Prioritising what matters most

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

Through Barometer & Spotlight surveys and the online community

### 2. We play back what they said

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

### 3. Confirm their priorities

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

02



## Getting ready (Briefing session)

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

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

The facilitator talks them through:

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

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

03



## The Accountability Session (Main meeting)

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

TMcK facilitator & Chair guiding the conversation:

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

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

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

04



## Agreeing what should happen next

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

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

05



## Publishing the outcomes and following up

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

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

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

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

[Priorities will be shared with the ISG]

# Sample

Who takes part in an Accountability Session



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Thank you!



[ccw.org.uk](http://ccw.org.uk)