



CCW

The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

**Southern Water
Accountability Session
transcript**

13TH APRIL 2026

Attendance list

Lawrence Gosden	Chief Executive Officer of Southern Water
Stuart Ledger	Chief Financial Officer of Southern Water
Alexis Knight	Chief Customer Officer of Southern Water
Nick Mills	Director of Environment and Innovation at Southern Water
John Penicud	Managing Director of Wastewater at Southern Water
Samantha Hare	Insight Manager of Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead facilitator
Bev Keogh	Independent Board Member for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
10 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under Southern Water

CCW Chair: This meeting is being recorded for you all to be aware of. I am an independent Non-Executive Director and Deputy Chair of the Consumer Council for Water. The purpose of the Consumer Council for Water is to act as the independent voice for water and sewage consumers in England and Wales, making sure that customers are treated fairly and to have somewhere to turn to when things go wrong.

So, we resolve complaints for households and businesses and when issues remain unresolved with companies, and we advocate with government and regulators on behalf of customers, pushing for better services, fairer bills, and we contribute evidence and research to shape water policy and affordability support. So quite simply put, we're the water watchdog, and we have been asked to establish and run these Water Voice programmes by our Government-sponsored body and the regulator, and it is my absolute pleasure to do that this evening with everyone in attendance.

The purpose of Water Voice is quite simple really; it's to give customers a stronger, more direct voice in how their water company performs, communicates, and improves. So quite frankly, the session today is about accountability. It's an opportunity for customers to question senior leaders from Southern 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.

To be clear, it's not a complaints hearing, it's not a technical inquiry, it's a structured customer-led conversation, focused on accountability, learning and agreeing clear and practical actions. The topics that we're going to cover this evening haven't been chosen by the company or by us at CCWater; they have been shaped by customers through ongoing surveys and a discussion with the Water Voice Panel, who are all here this evening. It's important for everybody to understand this is their agenda as Southern Water customers.

But before we formally start the session, I just want to set a real clear tone at 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 expectations and the way that the questions will be posed will give the context and then the question, and I'm hoping the company will find that really helpful.

Equally, we expect really clear and transparent responses from the Southern Water senior team; answer the question that you're asked with as little additional information, that can be confusing, as possible. The company will have just five minutes to respond to each question and a timer is going to appear on the screen to help with time management. So, limiting jargon and sticking to providing clear answers to questions will really help the discussion this evening.

I will have to interrupt if there is a risk the questions are not being answered, I'd rather not have to do that. So please, answer the question put to you in a really clear and concise way. The session is being fully transcribed and is going to be published. A summary report will follow, and the company will be expected to publish an action plan responding to commitments made this evening. That transparency is a key part of what makes this process meaningful. In terms of ground rules, we're going to take one person at a time, we'll keep contributions focused and will concentrate on forward-looking actions, what will change by when and how will customers know?

So now I'd like to just join and briefly introduce my support act this evening, Sam. Sam is an Independent Lead Facilitator from the research agency Taylor McKenzie, and they are working with the Consumer Council for Water to facilitate the full Water Voice programme. Sam will expertly guide the discussion this evening and absolutely make sure that all voices are heard.

Representing Southern Water this evening we've got Lawrence Gosden, the Chief Executive Officer; Stuart Ledger, the Chief Financial Officer; Alexis Knight, the Chief Customer Officer; Nick Mills, the Director of Environment and Innovation; and John Penicud, the Managing Director of Wastewater, and we welcome you all. Thank you again for being here. And now I'm going to hand over to Sam to start the discussion.

TMcK Facilitator: Lovely, thank you so much, Bev. Before we do begin, I just want to go through a little bit about your names and also how the transcripts that Bev just mentioned will be handled. So, in this room this evening we'll only be using first names, at which I can see everyone has joined with, so well done. And in the published transcript we'll be ensuring all customer names are redacted.

So, after the session we will send you the transcription and you'll have the opportunity to review it and everything that's written in it before it gets published. At that point you have the chance to say if there's anything that you'd prefer to be removed or have further anonymised before it does get published, and we'll then respect any requests that anybody does have, so feel free to get in touch with us.

The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect our discussion today. I mean the key to this whole thing is transparency within the action plan, and we want to make sure of that by publishing the transcript and also the actions agreed. But it's not to single out any one individual or anything like that. As we mentioned during the briefing session that we had, each question, so there will be three in total this evening, each question will follow the same structure. So, a customer will be asked to ask the question, Southern Water will have five minutes to respond, you as community members will then be able to react to that response and give your thoughts and feelings on that, and we'll work together to define the actions clearly and help to form the company or Southern Water's action plan.

So, during the session we'll create a live document to capture the expected actions and outcome, both from what Southern Water puts forward today and also what you as community members wish to put forward, and we'll share that on the screen and talk through everything that's discussed. After that, Southern Water will have some time to respond to any specific actions that they feel are out of scope, and this webinar is made available for live viewing. We do have an observer only room as well, and within that room we have members of the CCW Team, Defra, Ofwat, Southern Water, the Southern Water Independent Challenge Group Chair, and community members like yourselves on the CCW Water Voice Panel.

Lovely, okay that's enough from me just now, good to get some of your input already in the form of just a little bit of an introduction, if that's okay? I'll just go round the room, if I can get you all to introduce yourselves and just first name and a little bit about you? Can we start with Community Member 1, please?

Community Member 1: Yeah, good evening everybody, nice to see you again. So, I'm Community Member 1, I'm from Southampton, I work as a freelancer. I class it as consultancy and support, which is a little bit grander than what it actually is, but it's all I could think of. I also care for my elderly mum, so my time is split between that and working, and yeah, that would be me.

Community Member 2: Hi everyone, I'm Community Member 2, and I live on the Isle of Wight. I'm a retired civil engineer and I'm a keen gardener and I'm very keen on swimming in open water, and that's one of the reasons why I'm here.

Community Member 3: Hello, I'm Community Member 3, I'm from Hastings. I work in construction. I'm just frustrated with the sewerage discharges that the water [companies] keep doing, that's my motivation for being here.

Community Member 4: Hi everyone, I'm Community Member 4, I'm 63 and I live in the New Forest. I was – well, retired banker a long time ago, I just work a day or so a week at the golf club where I play golf. I've got grandkids, I love taking them down to the beach, I love living near the coast. But I also go kayaking in the sea and in the Beaulieu River. Other interests, golf, socialising, eating, drinking, holidays, all of that good stuff.

Community Member 5: Hi, I'm Community Member 5, I live just outside of Southampton with my husband and two sons. I'm a teacher and in my spare time I enjoy a bit of theatre, swimming, aqua aerobics and travelling.

Community Member 6: Hi, so yeah, I'm Community Member 6, nice to see you all again. I live in Margate just outside of London. I live with my daughter and I work in the creative industry. And yeah, my main motivation for being here is just a lot of my outside time is affected by the pollution, so it's really affecting the beaches here, so I'd like to hear what Southern Water have to say about that.

Community Member 7: Hiya, my name's Community Member 7, I'm a pharmacy technician working for the NHS, living in Hastings. Yeah, I enjoy living by the sea and using the countryside.

Community Member 8: I'm Community Member 8, I live in Rochester in Kent.¹

Community Member 9: Hiya, my name is Community Member 9, I live in Brighton and Hove. I work in social housing, and I live at home with my partner and our toddler and dog. So really close to the beach, so we spend a lot of time down at the beach and love sea swimming and paddleboarding on the local rivers and waterways and things.

Community Member 10: Hi, my name is Community Member 10, I live in West Sussex. I'm a nurse by background. I live at home with my partner and cat. In terms of motivations for doing this, as someone has already mentioned regarding the amount of sewage that's being discharged into our waters, and like a lot of other participants, very near the beach, so yeah, thank you.

TMcK Facilitator: Bev, I'll hand over back to you now to introduce the first community member to ask the question, and I will add John and Nick to the call.

CCW Chair: Okay great, and hopefully we can get Community Member 8 back, so he can participate. So, have John and Nick joined?

TMcK Facilitator: We have Nick.

CCW Chair: Oh, Community Member 8, you're back, brilliant. Hiya Nick, we can see you now. Is John with us?

John Penicud: I am.

CCW Chair: Hi, John. Okay, thank you both for joining, I'm just going to introduce the first question. So, Community Member 4, I'm going to hand over to you for you to – the question will be on the screen Nick and John, Community Member 4, is going to read through it all, there's a bit of context in every question to help as well. So, Community Member 4, over to you.

Community Member 4: Hi all, yeah, so there's a lot of discussion about storm and sewage discharges, so we often hear about sewage discharges and storm overflows affecting local seas, rivers, and beaches. We'd like Southern Water to focus on prevention, not just

¹ Community Member 8 leaves the call and reconnects at this point due to feedback on the connection.

reporting incidents after they've happened, and we'd like clear local information on what's happened, what harm it's caused and what will change in the areas most affected. So, what will Southern Water do to further reduce sewage and storm overflows and prevent repeat incidents and by when? And how will you clearly communicate this to us as customers?

CCW Chair: Okay so in responding, it's going to be really helpful, as I said in my intro, if you could be as specific as possible. Possibly set out a bit about what's already in place, that will be useful and maybe what's planned and what might change, and when those changes will happen. So, we're going to pop a timer on, Sam, I think, to help John and Nick stay to time, so it's a great opportunity for you to give a good answer to the customers you serve here. So, I'll hand over to you, John.

John Penicud: Thanks, Bev, and thanks for the question, Community Member 4. So, I think in terms of the clear information, that's really through our Rivers and Seas Watch, I'll get Nick to mention that in a minute. In terms of what are we doing to prevent the overflow from happening, we've got a [Clean] Rivers and Seas Plan that we publish, which is looking to deliver around 3,000 fewer releases a year, including a 49% reduction in overflows near bathing waters and a 50% reduction in overflows where we're impacting the environment.

So very much working with the Environment Agency, we've been asked to reduce our most impacting storm overflows first. Obviously, overflows happen during rainfall when the system becomes overloaded hydraulically with rain or with groundwater. We're really privileged in the South of England to live on a chalk aquifer, which is great from a drinking water perspective. It does mean we have a higher groundwater level, which can force its way into our sewers and pipes, often customer pipes and then cause those overflows also in dry weather. So, we're tackling both of those problems over the next five years with our £1.5bn Clean Rivers and Seas Plan.

Maybe if I go to the first part of the question second. Nick, did you want to just explain how we're being transparent and open with our data as well, and showing the impact that those overflows might have to customers as well?

Nick Mills: No problem. So, John's mentioned a service called Rivers and Seas Watch, it's a website, it's a portal. It's a map that has a number of icons on; it's updated every five minutes with information on which overflows are activating. One of the really important things that's on there is actually it shows the plan, so if you click "Investment Plan", which is a toggle on the left-hand side of that, you can see which overflows we're going to invest in and how big the challenge is and when we'll be spending the money.

It also now shows which overflows are currently in progress. The only thing I'll build on, I think, is that we in this five-year investment period, we're investing in continuous water quality monitors, which will go into rivers. So, we'll be installing 300 over the next four years, and I'm pleased to say that actually the New Forest has actually got some of the first deployment.

The plan is to also display that water quality information on the same service, that's going to take us a bit of time. The pilot has started with the instruments in the river, and the plan is to get that data onto the website and publicly displayed as well. And over the next 10 years, every single discharge point into a river will have an upstream and a downstream monitor, so that is required in legislation and the pilot has started. Over the next five years, or the next four years, there will be 300, and then another 1,000 in the period afterwards.

John Penicud: So, we know we've got lots more work to do on that, and we know that storm overflows are not acceptable and we're absolutely committed to continuing to reduce those. So maybe just to give you some of the "what that looks like" then from an overall picture, and then I guess we can answer any follow-up, Bev, in terms of specifics. Is that by

2035, 75% of those overflows, even the most frequently overflowing ones, the ones that are in those really sensitive shellfish and other nutrient areas, will be meeting the Government's 2050 targets.

And I guess what that means is we'll cut overflow releases by an average of 8,000 a year. Now, as our climate changes and warms, you'll get those storm events or really wet winters like we've just had, which can make those systems spill more frequently, but actually targeting our investment, the investment that we have to make, those most acute overflows will really help that.

CCW Chair: John, the second part of the question around how will you clearly communicate this to us as customers, can you address that part of the question?

John Penicud: Yeah, sure, thanks, Bev. So, through our portal, which is the Rivers and Seas Watch, that's got models in there that shows as the release happens, within one hour we'll post that onto that, so that's how we'll show it happens. We also give that data by API to people at Surfers Against Sewage, they also use that in their data, and it also goes to the National Storm Overflow Hub within an hour as well.

CCW Chair: What's API, John, sorry to interrupt?

John Penicud: Sorry, API, it's just a link, a link between our data, and we make it publicly available to anyone that wants it. Surfers Against Sewage, are just one of those parties that take it. But within our Rivers and Seas Watch app are tidal models and this shows some of our overflow points and how many kilometres offshore. I'm in Eastbourne this evening and the overflow here point from the treatment works and when obviously it goes to – as we call it, "storm" – that's nearly five and a half kilometres offshore.

So, we show where it's overflowing, and then obviously, depending on the tides particularly, I know Community Member 4, you said you were living by the coast, that will move up and down and move around, so it's showing the impact in terms of where these tides go allows us to model that water quality. It is worth saying we're only one element of what happens in the sea, you've obviously got shipping and everything else around us, but we are committed to sharing that via our map.

CCW Chair: Okay, thank you for that response both Nick and John. We're now going to turn just to pause and turn back to the customers for a second. Sam, you're going to guide this part of the discussion to make sure that those specific actions are drawn out, you know, are they happy with the company's response?

TMcK Facilitator: Lovely, thank you so much, Bev. So, for this section we're really focusing on your reaction to what you've just heard from Southern Water. So, we're not looking for any new questions at this point. So, I want you to think about whether anything felt clear and concrete or anything felt vague and uncertain, what if anything was missing and also what specific actions or commitments need to be strengthened in what you've heard so far. So, my team will be capturing all the points that you put forward as well and we'll go through them afterwards. But I think what we'll do is, we'll start with Community Member 4, if that's okay, as you're a lovely question asker. I mean how did you feel about that response, do you feel like your question was answered, or is there still stuff missing?

Community Member 4: Thank you for the comprehensive answers. Yeah, I thought they were good, clear answers. I was aware of some of that, and I also already have the Rivers and Seas Watch, as I mentioned earlier, I do go kayaking in the sea and Beaulieu River and take the grandkids down there. So that's useful, I was aware of the action plans as well, and the £1.5bn. So, I do like the app so far. I think the thing that was missing a little bit, and apologies if I missed it, I am quite hard of hearing, but I've got subtitles on, is the only data

I've actually seen about sewage overflows in particular, rather than storm ones online, is annual figures, and disappointingly, I think '22 to '23 to '24, actually they carried on getting worse.

So, apologies if I'm not looking in the right place, and I didn't quite hear it in the guys' answers, is will there be more regular reporting? The app is good now to see what's happening now, basically I just use that to see, "Am I going to go in the sea today, or is something happening that's gone wrong that's nasty, is there sewage in there?" But what I'm not seeing is I guess like a trend, you know, where it's a quarterly reporting or six monthly reporting to see are the actions working, are these storm and sewage overflows reducing, is the money we're paying in this action plan, you know, the money being put to good use? So, it's about the frequency of the reporting and actually where is it in some kind of trend line, was my follow-up question?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay Community Member 4, how can we turn that into an action for Southern Water? So, you mentioned that you only sort of notice annual figures, what would be an ideal situation, or what would you really want to see?

Community Member 4: I'd like something more regular, because I think we do have bad winters, I get that, and that can completely throw the line out of kilter. So, to see a proper picture, if I'm only seeing annual data, you probably do need three or four years' worth of data, which then it's too long. So, I guess what I'm after is something that's easily accessible, you know, a public website or something, or even we get prompted when we get our water bill, to show a quarterly and yearly trend line of the number of incidents and perhaps the volume of the incidents, the serious sewage overflows.

And I guess, the guys might well say to be a fair comparison, you'd probably need to compare say Quarter 4 this year to Quarter 4 the year before because of it's winter, there's more rainfall. However they want to design it, I think I'd like to just see the more regular A) the target, you know, what's their target, the reduction, and what was the actual compared to this time last year and the year before, so we can see we're making progress, or the guys are making progress, or we're not.

TMcK Facilitator: Great Community Member 4, thank you so much, there's some good action points to put forward there. Does anyone else have anything they want to add? Community Member 8, you put a little thumbs up to Community Member 4, so I'm assuming you're in agreement?

Community Member 8: Correct, yes I am.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2, were you about to speak there?

Community Member 2: Yeah, I'm really interested in what's been said there and I've had a look at the Rivers and Seas Watch website and it's got some good data on it. But I'd like a bit of context here. I mean John talked about 3,000 fewer releases per year, I know that my local sewage discharge point has had 235 in the last three months, and so this number of 3,000 seems very minute, and I'd like a bit of context in terms of a one-minute discharge is completely different to a 10-hour discharge, you know, can we sort of give some sort of idea of what these things actually mean?

And that £1.5bn pound investment, which is very welcome, but I'd like to see what that is in terms of what amount is needed to get all of the network up to standard, you know, is it a drop in the ocean, are we talking £100bn? You know, £1.5bn doesn't mean too much unless we know what it's part of. And the point that Nick made about 75% of discharge points to meet targets, the 2035 targets, and reduce 8,000 discharges a year, I'd like to know why that percentage is not higher, why Southern Water aren't aiming for 99% of their

discharges to meet those targets? I think they're good figures to put out to the public, but we don't know the whole picture, you know, how much more work needs to be done in the long run to bring everything up to a good standard?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so really interesting points there, and I guess a few gaps in information on your side. How do we turn that into an action for Southern Water, what could they do, or what could they give you or send you, or whatever it is, to provide that information?

Community Member 2: Yeah, I'd like to see those figures quoted as part of the whole. You know, 3,000 fewer releases out of how many thousand happen every year? £1.5bn investment out of how much is needed? Just to give a bit of reality to us customers so that we see how far along Southern Water are going and how well they're tackling this problem.

TMcK Facilitator: Anyone else have anything they want to say?

Community Member 1: All I could really think, I think everybody's really covered really good points. Thank you firstly for the answer. They mentioned about the storm drain monitor, there's going to need to be work for an API between those and I think the app or the website, I think they said, but getting the information out there, and that's going to take time. But is there going to be – because obviously this is, you know, a large problem, is there going to be, or will there be, any kind of interim effort to get the information out there before that happens? Any other way because there's lots of ways perhaps that could be done, I don't know?

But I think also, yeah, to echo what Community Member 4 said, I think context, very impressive figures of money, 75% sounds an impressive target. But we need context, perhaps in comparison to what other companies are doing, or other countries, I don't know if that's possible, I might be naïve? And the timeframes, sort of 2050 targets to be met, they said that the storm flows, you know, were not a good thing, they were not what was wanted, now it's going to be a reversal on the idea of monitors.

But regards that, on the 75% target is that comparable to what other companies are doing? I think sometimes I just would like to see a comparison chart between the different water companies to get some idea, to give it validity and context in comparison to what others are doing, because that's what's missing in a lot of this is as a layman, I don't know truly that all this means in the bigger picture.

TMcK Facilitator: What do you want to see from a comparison chart, or whatever it is that you're given?

Community Member 1: I think firstly, you know, I understand there's different areas, there's different levels of rainfall, there's different issues around the pollution, but I think if we were seeing comparisons on how much pollution was coming out from different companies, in a way that holds them accountable just simply by comparison. I don't know, it may not work, but it also just gives us an idea of the better performing and the worst performing. But again, with lack of knowledge, I don't know if it would even be a fair comparison.

TMcK Facilitator: You mentioned earlier about is there any interim efforts for storm drain monitors and things like that, what would you want to see?

Community Member 1: I mean I think with the technology we've got now, I imagine that there must be some kind of interim way of getting that information out there to people. I know it might be passed to interested parties, but I think it's something given the scale of issue that should be widely available quickly, and there should be something before the

technology to get it out on the app or the website is bridged, something in the interim for people.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much, Community Member 1. Community Member 10, you've been patiently waiting with your hand up?

Community Member 10: So yeah, everyone's made some really good points. I just think in terms of things that are perhaps not quite clear was regards to the water quality meters. So obviously, it's great that they're obviously investing in them and that I think it was said about the first one being in the New Forest, I guess my – the thing that is not, not so much confusing, but I would like more clarity on, is that we have had – they have had water quality meters before and there have been issues with them. So, I guess like it's more around in terms of maintenance to make sure they are working optimally and also whether we, the public, can report issues with these water quality systems, or if there's a means of doing so. Because yes, so for me that was, yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: What could they do then, what's an action that they could take onboard when they're bringing up those water quality meters?

Community Member 10: Well, I just think for me personally, my confidence of them is not great because previously they were unable to work either due to technology or, you know, sewage, algae covering it all, so they're not reading accurately. So just to show that regular checks are being done for maintenance and upkeep of these regularly. And that there are a means for us, the public, to also report any issues or concerns with them because previously they did not work properly.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, I've got two follow-up questions for you, Community Member 10, if that's all right?

Community Member 10: Yeah?

TMcK Facilitator: What's regularly that they should be doing the checks, what's the ideal there?

Community Member 10: I mean I would say at least monthly.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, and reporting issues, how would you want to do that?

Community Member 10: Well, I mean for me personally, just because I'm on my phone a lot, just the option to be able to do that online, like via a form or something. You know, like in the same way that if you're reporting, for example, that you've got no water or whatever, that you can do it online via a form.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm conscious of time, but does anyone else have anything they want to add about what they've heard the response for this question?

CCW Chair: Sam, can I just raise two things?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah?

CCW Chair: I would be interested in understanding a little bit more on this communication point. So, I think there's two aspects of that is it's how will Southern Water communicate with customers who don't access that Rivers and Seas webpage or website, and it is used, but what about those who don't access it or can't access it, how would that information get out in other ways, in other channels? And I think those are two quite important points around the comms of this.

Some great responses in fairness from the team at Southern, some good commitments, how do you better communicate that? So, I'd like to see that if we can on the action plan?

TMcK Facilitator: Of course. I mean does anyone have any thoughts on that and how Southern Water could communicate better with people that don't or can't access online means?

Community Member 10: I think it's hard to say a specific thing because obviously it's just trying to make it more accessible. For some people, a letter in the post would be more beneficial for them, whereas like some of us who use technology a lot, you know, obviously you've got the online formats. You do generally, people generally even if it's an older version have text message, so I guess it's just Southern Water maybe trying to think about ways to reach their customers in different ways.

Because obviously if you think of like, I don't want to be stereotypical here, but generally the older generation, you know, perhaps technology is not their first thing, it's just about basically being accessible, so text, I think letters would be quite useful with updates, but I appreciate paper and stuff. But it's just I think having that thought of all the customers, so like neurodivergent, etc. So yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Does anyone else have any thoughts on that?

Community Member 1: Maybe potentially giving those who don't have the access to the technology an option to say if they want to opt in to getting some kind of paper update, a leaflet with their bills, you know, it doesn't need to be a blanket, because there's a lot of people will have the access to technology, but those that don't ... And again, I understand it's going to be difficult because as Community Member 10 said, you don't want to stereotype, but they will have data on customers and those for example, who don't have an email, potentially they could be offered the chance to get data in a paper format?

TMcK Facilitator: So, sort of an option to opt in. How would that be communicated, or how would they ...?

Community Member 1: I guess they would have to post it out or run a campaign on the radio. I mean I understand that TV is expensive, but radio is going to be expensive. Or billboard, there are multiple ways to run campaigns. But the data, the demographics must be there linked to who has email and who uses apps, etc. potentially should be available and if they make people aware who don't use that, that they can opt in and get this information another way, could be a more direct way of capturing those people who need to get it that way.

TMcK Facilitator: The team have been working hard and typing. Oh, sorry Community Member 8, you've got your hand up there?

Community Member 8: Yeah, I was just going to suggest that we could perhaps have something on the bill which comes out, which says that, "I can't access the website, could you please post me this information?" Because it's obviously impractical to do this for everyone because the costs and everything would be extreme, but if we would just have something on the bill which everyone would obviously receive, which says, you know, "Please inform me by another means because I can't do it via the website," or whatever. Just a thought.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to share with you the action plan that's being typed up, and it's split into what Southern Water are currently doing, what they're planning on doing in the future and then also actions that you as community members have come up on the call today. I'm going to just read through all of them and then I'll open up to the conversation

again and we can refine any of these actions that need to be refined before heading back over to Southern Water for any final responses to the actions.

CCW Chair: I'm just conscious of time, that's all, just a time check for you.

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, it's okay, I'll read out the ideal water company response for that one then. So, you as community members came up with five main actions here.

[A] Offer an interim method of sharing water quality monitor data with the public before the full API integration with the app or website is completed.

[B] More regular reporting for overflows, so for example, six monthly or quarterly, that can help show a trend – not just annually or possibly seasonal. Easily accessible via the website.

[C] Investment figures and spill data which should be contextualised – against other water companies or other countries – and made more relatable and tangible for customers.

[D] Providing consumers with confidence that water quality meters are operational and well maintained and that would be done at least monthly – and that concerns can be reported by consumers online via a form.

[E] For customers who do not/cannot access digital information sources, for example, the Rivers and Seas website – how is this water quality information delivered to these individuals? Letters via post, text messages, opt in to updates within bills, campaigns on the radio, via post and on the bill.

Is there anything that's not been captured within this action plan about anything that we've discussed as a community here? In that case then, I will head back to Bev, who will check in with Southern Water again. I'll leave this up on the screen just now.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Sam. Okay, so just before we finalise the actions, I really want to give Southern Water, so John and Nick, an opportunity to highlight, are there any commitments that you believe that are listed here that are just simply not feasible, and if there are, can you explain to us why that is the case? If there are constraints that maybe say are regulatory, financial or operational or legal, set those out for us transparently so that we can kind of understand the reasons why. And any such explanation that you give us, of course will be recorded as part of this session. So, anything you think you see here, Nick and John, that may not be feasible?

John Penicud: No, I don't believe so, Bev, and obviously just to say thanks to the panel for that. We were messaging away in the background there, I think some of that mirrors some of the work we've done with our own customer panels, particularly around that context point, I think was really helpful for us to hear, it's something we've heard before. So, this just reinforces is for us.

I'd just point out, we currently publish something called a "Pollution Instant Reduction Plan" or a PIRP, and a number of our advisory panels have been suggesting we do something similar for spills precisely for the points that Community Member 2 and others made there. So, I really appreciate the feedback there. The only other thing I would just mention is we're trialling with Worthing and Brighton Councils at the moment electronic signage on bathing waters, we've also got one in Hastings as well, and whether we can link through to people that might not be able to access the website just as they're down by the beach, just through electronic signs.

And definitely something that we're also really keen to look at from listening to discussions, is just around text messaging from our existing platform, that's something we do anyway,

as you know, for water outages and incidents, there should be no reason why the technology can't exist for us to do the same thing for water quality. And then finally, I think it was the point that Community Member 10, made, just about the quality of sensors and the data testing we do, I'm sorry that that hasn't worked for you in the past, I do apologise about that, but working with our regulators, we have these event duration monitors, they're the signals that generate spill notifications in the first place, these EDMs².

We're already monitored on how available they are. We're up to about 98% availability at the moment, they have monthly tests on them as well, so it's a really useful pointer to us to make sure we do the same thing and make that publicly available and transparent when we roll out these in river quality monitors, so thank you for your feedback on that, Community Member 10, I really appreciate it.

CCW Chair: So, for the record, we now agree the actions under that question, so thank you to Nick and John, and thank you to Community Member 4 for asking the question and the panel for articulating your thoughts really well.

We're now going to move on to the next question.

TMcK Facilitator: There's some new Southern Water representatives being added, so goodbye for now John and Nick.

CCW Chair: And we are going to welcome Lawrence Gosden, the Chief Executive Officer and Alexis Knight, the Chief Customer Officer. I can see Alexis has joined.

TMcK Facilitator: It always takes a few clicks, apologies.

CCW Chair: Lawrence has joined. Hi, Lawrence.

Lawrence Gosden: Hi Bev, good evening.

CCW Chair: Hi. I am going to hand over to the second question, it's going to be asked by the panellist, Community Member 5. And again, in the same format Lawrence and Alexis, Community Member 5, will set out the context and then she will ask a question. Hopefully, that will be helpful for you?

Lawrence Gosden: Thank you, that will be great.

Community Member 5: Okay, so I wanted to ask you a little bit about bills and the fact that they've increased with little to no explanation quite dramatically over the last year or so.

We'd like to be forewarned when this happens and know what help's available for people that are struggling to pay their bills. We want their support to be communicated clearly and simply to all customers. So, could you please tell me what steps Southern Water can take to ensure customers are forewarned about any such increases and perhaps we could be provided with information about how every pound is spent? And could we make sure that everyone who needs support knows what help is available and how to get that help?

CCW Chair: Thank you Community Member 5, so Lawrence and Alexis again the same theme in responding, it would be really helpful if you can be as specific as possible, maybe setting out what's already in place. I'm sure there's already a lot of things in place, what's planned, what will change as a result of this discussion, and perhaps when changes will happen. And how customers can see and measure progress.

² Event Duration Monitors

Also, the community members, I know this is really important to you as bill payers, so please take notes as Lawrence and Alexis are answering the question. Again, we will have a timer on the screen to help hopefully stay to time, so if we can have limited jargon, that would be great. I will interrupt if I think that there is a need to, but hopefully you will be able to answer the question quite straightforwardly. So, I'm not sure who was going to go first but Alexis it's you or Lawrence, so I'll just hand over to you both then.

Lawrence Gosden: Alexis, if it's okay, I'll start?

Alexis Knight: Yeah, of course.

Lawrence Gosden: And then I'll hand over to you. Good evening, everybody, thank you so much for your time. Without a shadow of a doubt, we could have done a lot better and I'm really looking forward to hearing some of the panel's views around that in a moment. I think we could have been much faster and clearer about why bills were going up, what you were going to get for that money, a real value for money, so what are you actually getting for it? We did try and after, very quickly, put out a video, we put out things on the radio, we sent bill inserts, we did a lot of things, but it was slightly too late for my book. And this, the context I'm talking about, is last year when the big bill increase went up.

For this current year, there has been a smaller bill increase, but nevertheless, another bill increase, and for that bill increase we were more on the front foot, and we did provide information with the bills in order to be able to help people understand what they were getting for that increase in their bill. Because obviously, it's very different to energy, where energy is really all been about inflation, whereas actually you're getting something for this money, you're getting less overflows, less nutrients, and a sustainable water supply, particularly in the west of the region. Alexis, hello, I'll hand over to you and I can pick up.

Alexis Knight: Yeah, thank you. So firstly, thank you for inviting us and I just wanted to say to start actually that I'm a customer of Southern Water, I live in Hampshire, my friends and family are all customers, so we totally understand, right? I have this conversation with many of the people I spend my free time with, and I really do understand how difficult it's been for a number of customers having had such a significant bill increase.

I think what's really interesting is having listened to the earlier part of the session is there's definitely a theme of communication here, and we've got a lot of learnings to take from the last year into this year on how we can better speak with our customers, and this opportunity is fantastic to hear directly from you guys on what we can do. I think one of the big learnings for me in the last year is actually what customers really want to know is what this means for them personally, and I think a lot of our communications are quite generic and actually the theme we've seen is that customers really want to know what it means for them. So, what's happening within their region specifically.

So, we're working really hard to build a much more tailored communication plan, which is much more regionalised, so people receive communications that's really relevant to them. The other thing we must do a better job at is actually when our customers contact us that we're set up to support them better, and I think it's fair to say that we didn't do a good enough job in equipping our contact centre with being able to answer questions when customers needed it. So, we've done a lot of work this year in re-training our staff who speak directly to customers and making sure that they can respond to the specific questions around the bill increase and where the money's being spent.

And then specifically I just wanted to touch on the point around supporting our customers who really need help. So, this is a significant bill increase that we've had to kind of put our bills up by 47% last year, in the context of a really difficult environment with cost of living increasing. So, supporting our financially vulnerable customers is something we're really

passionate about, and we have got Essentials Tariffs to support with discounts for those who are financially in need. We've also got hardship funds, which allow us to support customers with debt write-off and supporting with grants to give them food vouchers and the like. So, there is support out there, but I fully accept that we've probably not done a good enough job in making that support visible to the people who need it.

So, one of the things that is really important in how we're improving in that space is the way that we're partnering with a number of charities and local authorities and also Citizens Advice Bureau, for example, and we're doing some data sharing with those third parties to make sure that we can identify the customers who need our support and we can proactively provide those kinds of tariffs. I'm just checking your question to make sure we've covered everything, there's a lot in here.

CCW Chair: There's a point here about information about how every pound is spent?

Alexis Knight: Yes, absolutely, and actually there is – I haven't got a copy in front of me, but there is a specific image that we've included in our bill insert this year and I don't know if any of the customers have seen it, but we've done a little infographic that breaks down every single pound exactly into how that is spent. So, we have taken that onboard for this year, but it's interesting that this has come up in the question, perhaps people haven't yet seen it, so we probably need to do a better job of getting that out there.

CCW Chair: I have a discretion to allow a couple of extra minutes for you as a water company to respond, and if it's okay with you Lawrence or Alexis, I'd like to offer you that, because I think there's more here I think that you can share with us?

Lawrence Gosden: There is, yeah.

CCW Chair: I'm just telling Sam to put the two-minute timer on.

Lawrence Gosden: So, to be specific on numbers, the amount of customers that we are currently supporting is about 170,000, and we expect that to rise up to about 180,000 people, and this is in the context of 5 million wastewater customers and about 2 million water customers, so it's quite a material number. And we're providing those with a 45% discount as a minimum. And in some cases where there is really extreme hardship, then we extend that up to 90%. So that's the existing level of support. On top of that we also provide a hardship fund, that hardship fund also I think we've tripled it in value, Alexis, just back me on that?

Alexis Knight: Yeah, it's got £1.25m annually.

Lawrence Gosden: And that does everything from white goods to providing individual customers having a really difficult time just with really specific support, it's a direct support for certain customers. The last quick point that I wanted to make though was one of the real challenges that we've found is about it's actually getting people to sign up, and it's not as easy as you might think. It's definitely – because some people if you just provide the information, which is all obviously available on the website, is some people will sign up.

But we're finding more often than not, direct enrolment, auto enrolment is the best way, working with charities and local authorities where people who are on less than £22,000 as a household income get automatically a 45% discount. Because not everybody wants to admit that they're struggling, so we've had to go as multiple routes here in order to get that number up to 180,000 of people being supported.

CCW Chair: I'm now going to pause and just turn back to customers. Sam, you're going to guide this part of the discussion again. Let's draw out some specific actions, I can see that

there's some additional questions lurking in the background, so how do maybe we draw out some actions in relation to what we've heard today that are quite specific that the customers can work with their water company on over the coming months?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, so for this section again we're really wanting to hear your reaction to what we've just heard from Southern Water. And the same as before, anything that felt vague or uncertain or anything you'd want expanded on for building the action plan is now the time to ask it. I'll go to Community Member 5 first, if that's okay, as you were the one who asked the question. How did you find that response, Community Member 5?

Community Member 5: Sure, yeah, some interesting points made. One thing I'd like to revisit though is the very first increase I think was quoted at 47%, which is huge, and I just wondered whether – are there any thoughts around was it necessary to have that much of a huge increase in one go? Could it have been staggered to ease the pressure on households?

TMcK Facilitator: What action, I guess, can we put forward to Southern Water for that, what would you like to see off the back of that?

Community Member 5: You know, could they consider this in terms of future increases and making sure that they are staggered over a number of years and perhaps smaller amounts?

TMcK Facilitator: Anything else to add about that?

Community Member 5: No, that's fine.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much Community Member 5 and thank you for asking the question. Community Member 9, I think you had your hand up first?

Community Member 9: Thank you. Yes, I just had similar to Community Member 5 just said, what I was thinking was, I guess, in terms of an action point, was that my bill kind of tripled overnight, and I wouldn't fall in the category of somebody who is in hardship at all, but no matter who you are, an increase of your bill going up, your bill tripling is going to be really difficult to budget for. So yeah, in terms of an action point, just really almost just not doing that again to everybody and figuring out ways that things like that could be done over a longer period of time.

Or I don't really know of other ways that that could be absorbed, even if it was a few different increases across the course of a year, rather than just all of a sudden your bill is increasing. I'm also wondering as well if my bill went up so much because it hadn't been reviewed for such a long period of time maybe? So, kind of really timely, I guess, account management in terms of making sure that people are paying the right kind of amounts for their usage. Because like I say, I think mine did go up maybe a bit more because it just hadn't done for quite a period of time.

So, there was that, and then I was going to mention about again not only focusing on people who are in hardship because everybody's really felt they're taking the hit with the water bills. Southern Water are one of the organisations that don't offer things like free water-saving devices to help customers to use practical solutions at home. I know there's tips on saving water, but other companies do offer things like free water-saving devices to help people save water and reduce bills. So potentially looking at whether that's something that could be available to Southern Water customers?

And then my last point was about the £1 spent infographic, I have seen that, but what I didn't find so clear was it didn't talk about anything about profits at all. So, there's all this

talk and possibly I get misinformed or the media, I get carried away with it, but there didn't seem to be any transparency about whether the water companies are in profit and if they are, how much of my pound goes to profit, shareholders, people like that. There's only a mention of cost to service your account, which I would take as staffing fees basically and computer systems, I didn't feel ...

So, on that infographic it was really useful actually, but I didn't feel like it – I thought that was missing, maybe, I don't know, or maybe it just doesn't happen, which might have been worth saying even if that's the case. You know, that, "We're not turning a profit this year," or something like that, then maybe that can be an action to make that clear along with that infographic.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 8, you had your hand up?

Community Member 8: Yeah, just a couple of points really, one to pick up on what Community Member 9, has just said, I'd like that infographic to show on the per pound of bills how much is going in dividends and how much is going into executive pay out of each pound that's spent.

And just a query as much as a question, I hear a lot of people locally saying that their bills have doubled or even trebled as we've just heard, and I'm just wondering how that can be given the context of a 47% increase?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, how can that be turned into an action, what could they do to I guess communicate that with you and share information surrounding that with you?

Community Member 8: I'm just thinking that if someone's bill's gone up by more than 47%, is it possible to have some explanation as to why it's gone up by more than the headline figure, as it were?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, what would that explanation look like or how would you receive that?

Community Member 8: It could be bills, something on the bill which says, "Arrears of £200," or "Account not reviewed for the last three years, therefore this may appear to be a higher increase than the 47% which is headlined," something of that, just to explain it to people.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 10, you've got your hand up.

Community Member 10: Yeah, thank you. I guess what I wanted to feedback, if you like, was that obviously it was mentioned about that a lot is being done with regards to hardship, but not just hardship funds, also those that get the 45% tariff basically decrease in bill. I guess the thing that I want to put forward is that what happens if you're struggling but you earn more than the £22,000 and you're on benefits but you're not on a means tested benefit? I guess it's partly because yes, I am talking from personal experience here, because I'm not currently working and I am on benefits, but they're not means tested.

But based on that, I would not qualify and obviously it's not just for me, and I appreciate those that are on means tested benefits, you know, it is very good that they receive it, but I guess I just want Southern Water to kind of think about that the criteria is quite strict and that maybe a degree of flexibility or done on a case-by-case basis would be quite helpful to some customers, myself included, and just to have some thought into that, really.

And I also really like the point about what Community Member 9, said about water-saving devices, because I used to live more Chichester way before and you did get access to more free saving devices, and the thing is it is massively helpful. You know, things like water butts

and water gels and things like that, so I think it would really help customers if they did offer that more, or just reduce, you know, that sort of thing.

CCW Chair: Can I just do a time check? I know this is a really important point for the panel, but this really, this is about clear actions here. So, I notice there's quite a few hands up on the screen, so if we can keep it tight, that would be great?

TMcK Facilitator: We'll move on to Community Member 1 then, thank you Community Member 10.

Community Member 1: Firstly, thank you for the answer, and I appreciate the transparency around the fact that there could have been more information released beforehand. But to get very quick opinions and then actions, I think for me personally, that it was for everybody a big bill increase.

I would have felt better about it, in an initial discussion I said it was just mismanagement, and I didn't realise potentially that it was going to very large infrastructure investments. And I think that you know, that for customers and the company it's mutually beneficial at least if we are better informed and we would then feel better about it. I think there is space there to get people more engaged in everyday life, I don't sit and read every leaflet that comes through my door because I don't have time.

But by making it more regionalised on what's being done in the local areas, that's going to be better engagement for people, so I think that will help. I'm glad to hear about the improvement in contact centres, I've worked in contact centres, I wouldn't want to do it anymore, it's not an easy job. But ultimately, they are the people who we talk to, so it must be excellent training and attitudes within that.

So regards actions, I was pleased to hear Southern Water are passionate about people struggling and actually compared to other companies they do a great deal to help people, which is brilliant. But what surprised me was that so much of it, until I did this work, I hadn't actually heard of. I'm also on benefits, you know, I am on the Essentials Tariff, I have no choice, I do a lot of care work in the week, I paid for my mum. And I do believe that they are passionate, but I think that if they are passionate, there needs to be much more promotion of these subsidies, these schemes, the help that's offered, because 170-180,000 people wasn't a great number probably is a very small amount compared to those who actually need it.

I do appreciate there's an embarrassment component, but I think I'd like to see them get a campaign out there on the radio, maybe contact the Job Centre, the benefits agencies, people should be able to know about these things. And I didn't know about any of them until I accidentally staggered across the Essentials Tariff. I had to ring Southern Water to find out about that and I was very grateful, as I say.

TMcK Facilitator: Sorry to interrupt Community Member 1, what would be the big action for you then to put forward to Southern Water?

Community Member 1: If they are very passionate about helping people in poverty, then to do a better campaign on promoting what they offer to help people, radio, leaflets, engagement with other agencies.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 3, over to you, and I really want to push for action focus, so that we can add to the action plan and we can review them all together, if that's okay?

Community Member 3: Unfortunately, we don't have the same choice that we do with energy of providers, so whatever Southern Water set their prices, we don't have a great deal of choice. But I think it would be good to have on our bills a comparison against other providers elsewhere in the country, saying that the price per unit in Southern Water compared to the national average or to Thames or Anglian, whatever, would be a really good indicator of are we paying more than – are we right to feel like we're paying more than we should, or are we actually paying less than people in London or Newcastle or wherever? Just to have some kind of tangible comparison would be something that could be easily done and quite useful, I think.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 4, please?

Community Member 4: I'll try and be quick. I read somewhere, so I hope this is right, that out of every pound we pay into our bill, something like 2p goes on fixing leaks and 6p on preventing storm and sewage overflows, which sounds like a small percentage. I also read in that, that a whopping 26p is spent on paying interest on Southern Water's debt. So, the request for action I think, can Southern Water publish a summary of their financial position, their plan, their actions to improve their financial position and get that debt down, and then report progress against it.

I imagine that they have to produce this for the stock market and major shareholders already anyway, so I guess it's just talking about visibility and communications, you know, this is our money. Frankly, I would much prefer the money to be spent on fixing leaks and stopping sewage overflows, rather than just paying down massive debt.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2, I think it's just you left to go?

Community Member 2: Yeah, just a quick thing, I'd just like to hear a bit from Southern Water about commitment to smart water meters and how these can be rolled out, particularly to these vulnerable groups that we've been talking about. I think they need to be the priority possibly above business and other customers. Because I think there's a lot of information that says that these things really help people with their water usage, which is one way of bringing your bills down. So, I'd just like to hear a bit more about that from Southern Water.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, I'm just going to share now all the actions that the team have been typing up, and listening in. So, what does the ideal water company response look like to you as community members? So, lots of actions, lots of discussion there, so I'll go through them and then open up the conversation again, if there's anything missing that needs to be added.

[A] Better information on the drivers of bill increases – possibly at the level of each individual's bill.

[B] Comparative data on bills against other providers in England and Wales.

[C] Transparency around whether the company made any profit, include whether they have not, and how much of customers' £1 go into profit.

[D] Timely account management when it comes to bill reviews, to ensure customers are paying the correct amount for their usage.

[E] More promotion of available support needed, for example, campaigns on the radio, leaflets, and engagements with other agencies.

[F] More tailoring of financial hardship services to the individual, so a sort of case-by-case basis.

[G] Consider staggering bill increases for any future bill increases.

[H] Offer access to free water-saving devices, for example, water butts.

[I] Publish a summary of Southern Water's action plan to improve their financial position.

Lots of actions off the back of that conversation, so thank you so much for all your input. Over to you guys again, is there anything that has not been captured in the discussion that you would want to be added to the response for this question, or anything like that?

Community Member 3: My point about showing the comparison against other water providers, cost per unit is not on there.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so I've got Point [B], comparative data on bills against other providers.

Community Member 3: Oh, sorry.

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything you want us to expand on that, or are you happy with that?

Community Member 3: No, that's great.

TMcK Facilitator: There's lots of them. Any other points here? Lots of shaking heads? All okay? Lovely, I'll pass back over to Bev again, thank you again for all your input on that question, everybody.

CCW Chair: Okay great, thank you, panel. Lawrence, I'll just give you and the Southern Water team a brief opportunity to highlight if there's anything you hear you think that is absolutely not feasible or what your thoughts are on the actions?

Lawrence Gosden: No, I think they're great, there's nothing there that I was looking at thinking, "That's too difficult to do." I think on points like better information on the drivers of the increases, I think, and the comparative data, I think what might be helpful is to show if the bill is different, why is it different, what more are you getting or what less are you getting compared to another bit of the country. So that sort of value you're getting for your money is really clear, so I might just add that to that one, if that's okay?

I mean points like dividends, we haven't paid a dividend since 2017, and we deliberately don't make a profit, we use all of that back in infrastructure investment, and that's all published in our annual accounts which are all visible. So, we can easily pick up all those big points. Smart meters, we've got a couple of great questions around smart meters, we are rolling out smart meters for the entire region, so everybody will have a smart meter. I mean that will be the best water-saving device of all, because it gives information right in your hands about water usage. So, I mean in short Bev, I think there's some really great points there, there's nothing too difficult to deal with for us.

CCW Chair: Great, and Alexis, are you happy?

Alexis Knight: Yeah, do you know, I'm super happy because all of this aligns with the big themes that we are very aware we need to improve on. So really about communicating more clearly but really supporting customers in managing usage as well has come through as a really good theme. So, thank you, genuinely it's put a lot of extra colour to some of the bones of a plan that we're building, so it's been really useful, so thank you everybody.

CCW Chair: Okay, so thank you both, and for the record then we now agree the actions under this question. So, Alexis, I think we are losing you now, so thank you so much for being here this evening, I really appreciate it. Lawrence, you get to stay, and we're going to be joined by Stuart Ledger, the Chief Financial Officer. And thank you Lawrence for your answers to that previous question, you can see it was an important topic for the group. Is Stuart with us?

TMcK Facilitator: He should be coming on now. Stuart is in the room now.

CCW Chair: Hi Stuart, welcome, thank you for joining us this evening. And for the final question I'm going to hand over to our panellist Community Member 6, so Community Member 6, over to you?

Community Member 6: So, I'd like to ask this last question. So, we really want evidence of real long-term plans, not just business as usual and maintenance and we want to clearly understand how higher bills will lead to real infrastructure improvements, not just vague promises. We also really want to know what benefits we will actually see as a result. So how will Southern Water clearly communicate how our increased bills will lead to infrastructure improvements and what clear benefits will we as customers will see as a result?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 6. So again, to Lawrence and Stuart, it would be really helpful if we can be really clear and specific when answering the question. Ideally I don't want to give another two-minute extension for the answer to this one, but let's see how we go. It's important that you answer the question as you saw on the screen, a moment ago, so I'm just going to hand over.

Lawrence Gosden: I'll do the build-up and then if you can do the detail on the Enhancement Programme, that would be great? So, our entire plan is about £8.5bn, that is double the size of the plan that we had in the period leading up to 2025, the five years from 2020 to '25, so it's double the size of plan. That's fuelled by the money that is coming through our customers' bills and the investment that's coming from our shareholders who have also put in £2.5bn of their own money. So, it's a joint pot.

The money is split into two fundamental parts. The first is the running costs of running the company, so that's providing you with clean water to drink possible water and treating all of the wastewater that we receive at or sewage treatment works. That day-to-day running is about £4bn of the £8.5, so that leaves just about £4.6bn, which is enhancement money. So that's capital projects that are going to build different, better solutions to the performance of the company. It's grouped into three areas that we're going to be improving, so the first one is storm overflows, and you heard earlier it's just over £1bn, and Stuart will go through the details in a moment.

The second area, big area, is nutrient removal from rivers, and that is improving the quality of wastewater that is treated wastewater from our sewage treatment works to take out phosphorus and nitrogen and those kind of chemicals, which means there's less algae and improves river health. And there's about 1,000 kilometres of river that we're going to be improving just through that mechanism.

And then the third and final big area of enhancement and improvement is on building a new source of water, particularly for the west of the region. So that means in the future we won't have to take any water from chalk river and we will take it from different sources, a network of reservoirs and pipes right across the country that we're starting to build. So those three areas as well as the new reservoir that we're doing with Portsmouth Water in partnership. Those are the big chunks of where we're investing and what you get for it. Stuart, if you can ask you to peel back the next level of detail?

Stuart Ledger: Yeah, sure. Good evening, everyone. So, Lawrence talked about the big investments that we've got, so in this five-year period as Lawrence talked about storm overflows, so that is just over £1bn on that. Lawrence also mentioned nutrients, this is reducing basically the nutrients that come out the back of the sewage treatment plants, that's £810m on that. I'll talk a bit about where we're going to break this down into our regions as well. So, what we are doing and what we do is, we run regional drop-in centres and workshops effectively, where we then take people through the investments what will happen in their region as well, relating to that.

There's lots that we're doing around investigations and monitoring, and that's about £200m, around that. And then around growth, so obviously we have new developments coming into our area, and on waste we'll be spending just over £300m on that. On the water side, that was on the waste side, on the water side we have a big element is around supporting new supply. Building the interconnectors, looking at the demand that we've got coming forward. So, when we add all of that together, that gets towards around £1bn that will sit across all of that element, relating to that.

We then have our smart metering, our lead programme and then also a programme that's sitting around our reservoirs and taking those things forward. What we also have on top of that, what we're also doing is there's a further programme of investment ...

CCW Chair: Sorry to interrupt you, but I just want to bring you back to the important point of the question is how are Southern Water clearly communicating how increased bills will lead to infrastructure improvement? So, if you can talk about the communication bit, please?

Stuart Ledger: Sure, so I think, as part of that bill information that we've been putting out, explaining what's happening around the investments going forward, as I said, what we are also doing and have been doing, is explaining on a regional level. Because I think it's really important, people live in regions and they connect with their local area, and our customers need to understand what we're doing in those areas. What the investment will be, what it will lead to in terms of that output.

One of the other things that we've also developed, and Lawrence will possibly talk about, is our Mitie maps, and what they really try and do is they really try and show all the areas where we'll be making the investment and that sits against or rivers and the impact that it will have against our rivers, or the impact it will have in terms of our catchment area and how that will improve over time. But I think there's a lot of information, what we need to do is bring more of that together, put more of that onto our website and really help our customers understand. So, I think it's a really good challenge around how can we help everyone understand exactly what we're doing, because there's a lot there. There's a huge amount of information and then how we'll bring that forward.

And then all of those things then sit in a longer term set of plans, because ultimately this is our five-year plan, but we need to make sure we're building water resources for the future, this is a 50-year plan that we also have, this informs part of ... And again, what we should do is more to explain and help bring to life those plans. They do sit on our website, but probably there's more that we could do to make them more digestible for our customers.

CCW Chair: Sorry, we've slightly run over there, sorry Stuart to interrupt you again, so we've slightly run over by just over a minute. I think it's fair to say that the heart of the question, Sam, about clearly communicating to Stuart's point is it's a good question, there's more to think about in terms of that. I'm not entirely convinced that has been answered, but then, you know, the company have acknowledged that. So, when I go back to the panel, to the customers, as a panel be mindful of the fact that there's an outstanding part of your question.

TMcK Facilitator: Lovely. Is it time to go back to the panel members now?

CCW Chair: Yes.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much, Bev. Okay, the same as the other two questions, that you've done so brilliantly, I really want you to think of what was clear and concrete, what was then vague and uncertain, and as Bev mentioned, communication and also what clear benefits as customers you'll see as a result of any increases in bills and infrastructure improvements, which I think may have been missed a bit, but that's where we come in and we can help develop some actions for Southern Water based on those things.

CCW Chair: Yes, what do you want as customers, yeah?

TMcK Facilitator: Exactly. Okay, I'll start with Community Member 6, if that's okay? I remember during the briefing session you have a lot to say on this matter, so I'm sure you've got lots to say on Southern Water's response as well? So, we'll start off the conversation with you if that's okay, Community Member 6?

Community Member 6: Yes, so thank you for your response, I appreciate your time. There's a lot, yeah, there's a lot that's happening in terms of the infrastructure. I would argue that a lot of it is maintenance, however, I would just see it as poor planning. So, such a large increment in our bills, these things should have been sorted out a lot earlier. So yes, we are going to need more water sources, yes, we are going to need all these things, and that's part and parcel of operating a water company is that having that foresight and seeing that these are things that are going to have to be brought up. So, for our bills to go up on average 50%, really, I think that's also just very poor planning. So, I would argue that a lot of that is maintenance as well, and the customers are footing the end of that.

On top of that, I also would like to address the fact that it's great that all this infrastructure is taking place, and we understand why it's necessary, could we as customers see once your systems have been optimised and everything is running as it should really, will our bills then come back down or are we just expected to pay a year-on-year increase? At what point would we say, "Okay, well we've optimised our systems, maybe the customers can actually get some of that money back"? I would be interested to know as well.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay Community Member 6, that's an interesting point about what you say, once everything's been optimised, I mean how can we turn that into an action for Southern Water, what could they do once that's happened?

Community Member 6: So, I'd just like to see a really transparent sort of breakdown, I guess, of this is what we've done, this is how much it's saved us, and this is how much it can save you as a customer. I can't really get into the sort of nitty-gritty, I don't know about water companies, but what I do know is that I'm being told that something is being optimised, and whether that's ... I'll give an example of maybe, you know, lead pipes being phased out and new pipes being put in, would that then still be an increase for the customers, since that's already been done? I just would like to know that the bills would come down once important work has been actioned.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so interesting points. I mean I guess going back to the point on communication, how do they ...? So, you said a breakdown of what would happen after they've implemented, for example, new pipes, how do they communicate that information with you about how that benefits you as customers?

Community Member 6: I'd be happy to see it on websites, I'd be happy to see it on my bill. I'm not too fussed about how they do it, I just want it communicated. So yeah, probably on the bill, "It's gone down because we've achieved this, and we've optimised this."

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 9, you've got your hand up there, I'll pass over to you, if that's okay?

Community Member 9: Yeah, it's just a really quick point about I know there was I think Stuart said about a lot of the information is available on the website. I'm just really keen for that not to always be like a kind of a default position, only because there is so much information on Southern Water's website, that kind of clawing through it could be a bit difficult. So, I do think it's really important to have those targeted kind of bits of information that go out. And even things like newsletters, someone mentioned about regional meetings and things, and I've never, I think is probably have to go and seek out when that is, rather than I don't get a Southern Water newsletter or anything like that that tells me, "Oh, we're having a meeting in your area."

Or I don't get any targeted kind of requests to join meetings or if I have interests in these kinds of meetings. And the bill is a really great way to get information out, but often times when my bill comes, I am not clawing through it; I don't even look at it always because I know it's the same amount every month at the moment. So yeah, I do think the bills are a really good way of getting information out and it's a good cost-effective way as well when you're already doing a mail out to kind of get information out that way and to reduce the number of call backs and things that you get if you do multiple different comms. But yeah, I think the bill sometimes I guess, I wouldn't want just the bill or the website to be the ones, like the default position in how the company communicates.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so what's the action that we're putting forward here based on what you said there?

Community Member 9: I think it's just being really creative with communication, doing targeted communication. They already said about doing area specific communication and yeah and just thinking about whether they do need to look at wider communications in terms of things like newsletters. I wouldn't normally ever suggest something like that, I don't want that usually, like I would never want that from Virgin Media or someone, but water is something that everyone has and it's a precious resource. It feels like less of a choice, like I choose to go with Virgin Media, I don't choose Southern Water, so it feels like they do need to be a bit more accountable to customers and targeted and specific in their comms.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2, you've got your hand up?

Community Member 2: Yeah, just a quick one to build on what was said there by Community Member 9, and Southern Water have mentioned about regionalising things and breaking down their website. And I think I'd like to see a commitment to a bit more contact with customers within the regions. There's a big issue where I live locally with Southern Water representatives not turning up to County Council meetings, you know, but a bit more sort of action on the ground to have a few more open events about what are we doing locally. Because there's lots of things happening where I live and very few people know about them.

So, it comes back to that communication and making things easy to understand for people what's happening in their local area, how this infrastructure programme is going to affect them in both ways, in the benefits and the disbenefits of it, in terms of disruption. But a bit more local contact I think would be great, whether that comes newsletters or Facebook or whatever, but I think some face-to-face contact would be great, because this is good what we're doing tonight, but a lot more other people need to be able to have a chance to have a say.

TMcK Facilitator: I've got a follow-up question for you actually based on what you're saying about action on the ground and the sort of face-to-face. I mean how do you find out about that, what could they do to communicate things that are happening on the ground?

Community Member 2: I think social media is something that a lot of people use in various ways. And also, you know, local radio, local TV, regional news, things like that, just to put it out to as many people through as many different channels that, "We're going to have a meeting in this town hall, come along if you'd like to talk about your bill," sort of thing, or "talk about the new water recycling plant in Sandown," sort of thing, just so people feel like they have an involvement and can put forward concerns before they become big concerns.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 8, please?

Community Member 8: Yeah, I was just going to pick up on Community Member 6's point. Is it possible that Southern Water could publish when they expect the infrastructure improvements to have been completed, and that a date from which bills would then only be increased by CPI rather than for further infrastructure improvements?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, we can definitely put that forward as an action on the action plan just now. Thank you Community Member 8. Community Member 10?

Community Member 10: I just wanted to build on what was said regarding obviously infrastructure and obviously the things that Southern Water are doing.

So, I know particularly that there are infrastructure plans to recycle wastewater, I don't know fully, but basically recycled wastewater so that it can go into Havant Thicket Reservoir or whatever. And I just – my query is that there is concern about them doing this, not just from the cost of money point of view but just obviously you're talking about wastewater going potentially into our reservoirs, into our drinking water.³ And I just wondered if Southern Water could – again it comes down to communication, but also some reassurance or something because at the moment it doesn't ...

To me when I've seen it on the website and via the news, to me it makes me really worry, because how do we know it's safe to drink? Has it been tried and tested? You know, because if it hasn't, then they need to talk to us, because that is understandably a concern that we do have, that I definitely have.

TMcK Facilitator: We're trying to focus mainly on infrastructure improvements, but I guess it's still an interesting point that you've brought up about communication. So, I guess building reassurance. And any time we're looking for communication we're also wanting to get reassurance about say the infrastructure, the changes to the infrastructure, for example.

Community Member 10: Yes.

TMcK Facilitator: I mean, what would an ideal situation look like then in terms of how they communicate that with you or build the reassurance, I guess?

Community Member 10: I mean, to be honest, I think it would need to be face-to-face as in not one-to-one, but I mean like at a group level. So, like for example, communities, just so that the people from the community could have those questions and raise them and be responded to.

³ Southern Water has clarified that it is purified water, not wastewater, that can be pumped into reservoirs during the water recycling process. Full information on Southern Water's water recycling projects can be found on the [Southern Water website](#).

TMcK Facilitator: Any final points or potential actions that we can put forward here that's not already been talked about? We've got some shaking heads again, it's hard to tell sometimes. All good, okay, lovely. So, I'm just sharing, so again I'll just read through all the actions that we've discussed as a group, and then if there's anything missing or anything that you wish to be expanded on, we can do in a second. So, in terms of the question in relation to infrastructure and long-term investment, so what does an ideal water company response look like? So, the actions put forward from you as community members included:

[A] Clarity and context for long-term strategy, especially around expected impact on bills – indefinite increases or a process of investment, optimisation and resulting, levelling, or decreasing of bills.

[B] Transparent breakdown of what has been done, how much it has saved the company and how much it will save the customers. So, this could be included on the bill or shown on the website.

[C] Targeted information to customers, so for example, via a newsletter or regional communication, rather than customers having to seek out information specifically hidden online on their website. So, we ask for Southern Water to be creative and innovative when looking at communication methods.

[D] More face-to-face contact with customers within the region, so more action on the ground. Have more open events about what's happening locally and how it's going to affect customers. So, communication to find out about these events could include on social media, local radio, local TV, and regional news to try and get as many people learning about it.

[E] Build reassurance so face-to-face at group level, so that the community can raise questions and have their questions responded to for any worries that they have in relation to any changes to infrastructure or bills.

Okay, now I've read everything that my team have captured based on the discussion, I'll open it back up to you all and see if there's anything missing or anything that you wish to be expanded on based on what we've discussed? Community Member 1, you're right in there with your hand up, I'll go straight to you.

Community Member 1: Just a very simple action and point. I think there should be a sliding scale of reaction from Southern Water according to the level of issues that are happening. So, what I mean by that is when we have obviously a lot of issues going on in terms of pollution and bill raises and such, there should be a counter reaction of better communication and wider spread communication through better means as well. I don't think that the – whilst appreciated and obviously positive, but I don't think that the website alone and regional drop-ins balance out against some of the issues and problems that we've been hearing about. So, I think there needs to be an action plan of better response in terms to times of greater issue, if that makes sense?

TMcK Facilitator: Are you able to be a bit more specific about what it is you're looking for?

Community Member 1: When there is large bill rises, and higher levels of sewage and pollution and more negative press, there should be more communication from Southern Water, even if it is just to hold up hands or to be transparent or to give response in terms of what they're going to do directly against these negative issues. It should just be an adjustment of reaction according to what the level of issue, if things are going great and everything's okay, we would expect there to be less.

But when things aren't going great, then as a balance of responsibility there should be more communication via radio or TV or whatever method. And I know it's going to cost, but if they are to restore trust and reassurance to customers, then there has to be that equal communication to the level of problems. It's just a thought, I don't know if it's a sensible one?

TMcK Facilitator: I just want to bring it back to infrastructure improvements and the benefits that customers will see as a result. I mean the communication methods that you've mentioned there for the other topics and things like that, does that stand true for this as well, or is there any differences?

Community Member 1: No, I think it stands true, because the infrastructure improvements are directly related to some of the issues.

TMcK Facilitator: Anyone else want to jump in here about what they can see? Nothing missing or anything that you want to be expanded on before we go back to Southern Water for final comments? All good, lovely, okay, I'll pass back over to Bev again there.

CCW Chair: Okay, thank you Sam and the panel. So, Lawrence and Stuart I'd like to give you an opportunity to highlight if you have any concerns as to why some of these actions might not be feasible? What are your thoughts?

Lawrence Gosden: Well, firstly thank you, I mean that was a really – it's just really helpful. There's a very strong theme of communication coming here, there's a huge investment programme and there's almost so much to communicate and it's about timing and innovative channels and so I'm hearing that loud and clear, I really am. I think it chimes with some of the things that we are launching and have been doing for a bit, so quarterly newsletters going to all customers on email, a Your Water Matters, which we rotate every two months around a different bit of the region.

Think of it like Southern Water inside a box, and it's open for the whole day and people can just come and go and get answers. I go there, everybody can talk to people in Southern Water, so that's almost your drop-in. All the way through to social media and YouTube, we're pumping loads of videos out on YouTube of actual, physical infrastructure change and what people are getting from it in a local region. And then we've started a series of regional based radio adverts starting in the next few weeks, so everything I'm hearing is really giving more power to our elbow.

I think we just need to push harder. I think Community Member 1's point particularly resonated with me in that we've got to up the volume, you know, at these moments when the customers are sitting here thinking, "My bill's gone through the roof, what am I really getting for it?" We've got to really up the volume, so that's loud and clear.

There was one other point I wanted to make very quickly Bev, which is I really hear that point about how much bills have gone up, I really do. I wish I had more time to talk to you, to all of you, but the real bit that we've been battling in is bills have been kept low for about 10 years. Until last year they were actually lower just over a year ago than they were 10 years ago.

Whereas what the industry should have been doing, not just the water companies, but the whole regulatory system working together, we should have been investing over the last 10 years to get ahead of this. And then we could have stayed ahead of customer expectations. We are where we are, and we're sort of trying to catch up in one big step and it's really awful, which is why all the support is just so important. But thank you, incredibly constructive and some really interesting thoughts, we really appreciate the session with everybody.

CCW Chair: Stuart, any thoughts from you?

Stuart Ledger: I think Lawrence has said it all, really. Yeah, just to say thank you very much and thank you for your time.

CCW Chair: And there's definitely a reoccurring theme here of communication, and it's good, it's great actually to hear you recognise that. So, for the record, we've agreed the actions under this question, so this session has now come to a close. Lawrence and Stuart, thank you both for your input into the final question, and Lawrence a big thank you to you from the whole team for being here this evening. We have covered a huge amount of important themes, I have to say, we've agreed a clear set of actions in response to some issues raised by customers that really mean a lot to them.

The actions as we can see have been captured live during the session and will form the basis now of the company's formal response to what we've discussed this evening.

So, in terms of next steps, the full transcript will be published on the Consumer Council for Water's website within five working days. Before publication, an early draft will be shared with everyone and all participants, so you can review it and raise any concerns relating to any comments. A plain English summary will be published within 10 working days, and Southern Water is required to publish its action plan within 28 days of this session, setting out how it will deliver the commitments agreed this evening. As customers you will then be asked whether that action plan accurately reflects what we've discussed tonight, and our role as the Consumer Council for Water or the water watchdog, we will monitor progress and we will report publicly on delivery.

This process is designed to be transparent and also for those actions to be followed through. So, it's not just a discussion on important topics, it's an opportunity for you to work directly with us and the water company to make change happen.

I want to say a huge thank you to all of you for the time and thought and honesty that you've brought to this session, you are a great panel, and I know you are very passionate about your thoughts, and you probably could have shaped 10 questions for the team this evening. But the three you've shaped will make a huge difference in terms of the actions that you've agreed to the customers and the communities that Southern Water serves. Your input is what gives this process credibility and purpose, and from me I want to say a really big thank you for the way that you have engaged this evening. Good night, everyone.

[CLOSE]

CCW

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