



ccw

The voice for water consumers  
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

**Yorkshire Water  
Accountability Session  
transcript**

14TH APRIL 2026

# Attendance list

Nicola Shaw	CEO of Yorkshire Water
Matthew Pinder	Director of Customer Distribution and Collection of Yorkshire Water
Stephanie Pullen	Director for Asset and Asset Management of Yorkshire Water
Samantha Hare	Insight Manager of Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead facilitator
Rob Wilson	Chairman for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
12 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under Yorkshire Water

**CCW Chair:** Good evening, everyone and thank you very much for joining us tonight. My name is Rob Wilson and I'm chairing tonight's discussion, I'm chairman of the Consumer Council for Water and we act as the statutory champion and voice for water and sewage customers in England and Wales. Tonight's session is part of the Water Voice programme and the purpose of Water Voice is simple but very important all the same, to give customers a stronger, more direct voice in how their water company performs and communicates and ultimately, we hope, improves.

So this session is really focused on accountability and it's an opportunity for customers to question senior leaders from Yorkshire Water directly about the issues that matter most to you, about where improvement is needed and about what will change as a result of the discussion tonight. So just to be clear, this is not a complaints hearing, it's not a technical enquiry, it's a structured, customer-led conversation focused on accountability, learning, agreeing clear, practical solutions.

The topics we'll cover this evening haven't been chosen by the water company, they haven't been chosen by CCW, they've been shaped by customers through the ongoing surveys and discussions within the Water Voice panel that you've all been on, and that's really important because this is all about being your agenda tonight.

So I also want to set a pretty clear tone at the start, we expect this to be a respectful but challenging discussion this evening, customers should feel able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences but also their expectations of the company. Equally, we expect clear and transparent responses from Yorkshire Water's senior team. The session is going to be fully transcribed and it will be published, a summary report will follow and the company will be expected to publish an action plan responding to the commitments made. That transparency is a key part of this process and what makes it meaningful.

In terms of the ground rules, we'll take one person at a time, we'll keep contributions focused and we'll concentrate on forward looking actions, what I mean by that is what will change, by when and how customers will know it's changed.

I'd like to briefly introduce those who are joining us tonight, the customer panellists will get your chance to introduce yourselves with Sam in a minute, but first, our independent lead facilitator from Taylor McKenzie is Sam Hare, who will guide us through the discussion and ensure all the voices are heard. And representing Yorkshire Water this evening, we have three people. We have Nicola Shaw, welcome Nicola, she's CEO of Yorkshire Water, we have Matthew Pinder, who's Director of Customer Distribution and Collection, and we have Stephanie Pullen who is Director for Asset and Asset Management.

We're going to have a bit of chopping and changing in the questions, in the first question it will be Nicola and Matthew, the second it will be Nicola and Matthew and the third, it will be Nicola and Stephanie. That's all I'm going to say to start off with but I will be coming back shortly after Sam has done her introductions and you've done your own introductions. But thank you again for being here and I'll hand over to Sam to start the discussion.

**TMck Facilitator:** Thank you so much, Rob, and thank you so much for joining us all again this evening, it's nice to catch up again after a briefing session. Before we do begin, I want to explain just how names and the transcript will be handled. In the room this evening, we're only going to be using first names and in the published transcript, we'll ensure that all customer names are redacted. After the session, you'll have the opportunity to review the transcript before it is then published, so at that point, if there's anything that you would prefer to be removed or anything that you would rather be further anonymised, you can just request that to us and we'll make sure that that happens.

The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect the discussion and the actions agreed. So as Rob mentioned, it's all about transparency here and the transcript really helps to bring that out, but it's not to single out any individuals.

So as we talked through a bit about the process during our briefing call, I just want to go through it briefly again now. For each of the three questions tonight, we will have a customer ask the question and I will display that question on the screen. Yorkshire Water will then have five minutes to respond to that question with what they're doing currently and what they plan to do in the future. At that point, the question will be taken off the screen and I will copy and paste the question into the chat, so if you need to refer back to that, you'll be able to see it there.

After that, community members will react to what they've heard from Yorkshire Water and we'll work together to define the actions and put forward some new actions as well, for Yorkshire Water's action plan. After that, Yorkshire Water have some time to respond to any specific actions that we have put forward and they can, at that point, let us know if there's anything that feels out of scope. The webinar has also been made available to an off-the-side observation room as it were, so people are able to observe the session this evening but not directly take part like we are in this room. In the other room we have members of the CCW team, Defra, Ofwat, Yorkshire Water, the Yorkshire Water Independent Challenge Group Chair and other community members like yourself also on CCW's Water Voice Panel.

We'll start off with some introductions from you all, your first name and then a little bit about yourself. I've made a list of names so if you're at the top, I'm going to pick on you first if that's okay, so Community Member 1, if you could start us off with some introductions.

**Community Member 1:** Hi, I'm Community Member 1, I'm from Sheffield.

**Community Member 2:** My name's Community Member 2; retired civil servant, 75, mother of two, grandmother of five, great-grandmother of two, great-great-grandmother of two and grandmother of four dogs now.

**Community Member 3:** Hi, I'm Community Member 3 from Leeds, I'm a support worker and I live with my girlfriend and two small kids.

**Community Member 4:** Hi, I'm Community Member 4 from Leeds.

**Community Member 5:** Hi, I'm Community Member 5 and I'm from Leeds as well.

**Community Member 6:** Hi, I'm Community Member 6, I'm from Sheffield and I work in healthcare.

**Community Member 7:** Hi, I'm Community Member 7, I'm 52, I'm from Sheffield also and I work in the steel industry.

**Community Member 8:** Hi, I'm Community Member 8, I live in Leeds, I'm 69 and retired, live at home with my husband.

**Community Member 9:** Hi, I'm Community Member 9, I'm 59, from Sheffield and I work as a psychotherapist.

**Community Member 10:** I'm Community Member 10, I'm 72, I've lived in the Leeds area all my life and I'm retired.

**Community Member 11:** Hi, I'm Community Member 11, I live in York and I work in financial services.

**Community Member 12:** Hi, my name's Community Member 12, I'm from Wakefield, I work full time and I work in recruitment.

**TMcK Facilitator:** I'll pass back over to Rob to introduce our first question asker, and I will share the question on the screen.

**CCW Chair:** Just before I do that, I just want to add, this is a bit like Question Time in that the representatives from Yorkshire Water do know the subject area but they don't know the questions in advance, so they'll be seeing these questions for the first time. Community Member 12, over to you to ask the first question.

**Community Member 12:** On the screen as you can see, it says: Too often, the information customers need is buried on the website and only available to people who know where to look. Customers want communication to be a two-way street, with Yorkshire Water using more effective and accessible ways to share information and make sure it reaches the people who need it most.

How will Yorkshire Water enhance the way it communicates with customers so important information is clear, timely and easy to access, especially for those who are most affected or may struggle to find it?

This is obviously people that may have, I live in an elderly street and some have access to smartphones, some don't, some have internet, some don't, so it's like the vulnerable customers that may be hard to reach. Thank you.

**CCW Chair:** Thanks, Community Member 12. Before responding, it would be helpful if Yorkshire Water could be as specific as possible in addressing the question, if we could put the question in the chat, then we can take it down and see everybody. Please focus your time on answering the questions specifically if you possibly can, and to community members, make sure you're listening carefully and taking notes on things that either concern you or you welcome or you're interested in. If you veer off course, this is to Matthew and Nicola, I'll try and bring you back to the question so I may interrupt occasionally. With that, thank you again for being here tonight and over to you, you've got five minutes to answer the question but I may extend that if you're in the middle of something, there'll be a bit of flexibility. Nicola, over to you.

**Nicola Shaw:** Thanks, Rob and thank you for the question. I agree with you, Community Member 12, about our website not being easy to follow and one of the things we want to do in the next year or so is to give that a good refresh because you're absolutely right, it's one of the things that has come up many times with our customers, so we're starting to think about that and any input we get from you will be really helpful think about what's most important and how.

The reason for saying that I think there are issues that people want to talk about like their bill and any support we can give them to help pay the bill, how does the bill work? Why is it like it is? Are there different ways of doing it? Then there are things around as I said, support, what can we do to help them if they're nervous about their bill or they can't understand their bill, or they want it in a different format? So a whole bunch of stuff we can do around billing.

There are then times of crisis, let's say, when you haven't got water or there's something wrong with the sewage network or there's a leak you found in your street and you want to report it. Those are times when you want really personalised information and then mostly, what happens, is people call us and Matt and his team are working too on other mechanisms for communication like WhatsApp. So you can take a picture, you can send it in, we can ask you for other information, you can get a two-way process going which for

one of the parts of your question, was really on that, how you make it a two-way process and so in those times of crisis, it's particularly important when you want information directly.

Our challenge then becomes if we have a big issue, so its covering lots of people and we're uncertain about when we can fix it, so one of the things we've been doing is trying to think ahead about are there some scenarios that we can predict and give more people information on our website, the more people we have their telephone numbers, the easier it is for us to get in touch with them – obviously – we can send you a text or we can give you a call. So if there's anything you can do to promote giving us information, we'd really love it because it will help us. We don't have all of our customers' mobile numbers, we don't have all of our customers' email addresses, so the more we can do that, it does help us to give people information in real time. But we also work with the resilience forums and councils to try and do that, and one of the things I'm going to ask Matt to talk about a bit more is about what we're doing in that space to try and work out how do we cover everyone as quickly as we can, because he's closer to that than I am.

There's then a whole bunch of information people want in the background, stuff you want to know about where we're investing, what else we do, where the benefits of the investment have come and also, how you can help us. We do all sorts of things, we go to community events to try and get out into the community because we hear that is a really important way of getting communication, people trust it more, if we're at a fair in the summer or if we're in the high street, as we were in Rotherham recently, we try and do different things for different communities, to make sure we get out there.

We also educate. At school, we might have an assembly that we'd go to, we talk about how the water cycle works, taking water out of the river and putting back the wastewater once it's treated at the end, or people might come to one of our sites, a wastewater or clean water site for a school class, depending on ages ... and from all sorts of other things, just to try and increase that communication because we know people want different information from us at different times, we also have that on the website and we also do it with the bill, so we send people information about where we're investing across the county, it's a big county, lots of work going on. And then at the point of work, if you've passed one of our sites recently, I hope you're seeing banners that explain why we're doing the work there, to try and give people real time information about the disruption they're seeing in their community.

I'm going to hand over to Matt to talk a little bit about what we're trying to do at the moment of a crisis, with the local resilience forum and communicate with local councils and so on. Matt?

**Matthew Pinder:** Thanks, Nicola, thanks for the question, Community Member 12, I agree as well, I think we've got work to do on our website so just building on what Nicola said, some of the work we've been doing recently is we've taken the top six reasons that customers get in touch with Yorkshire Water about different problems, to understand how we need to improve the communication and what types of communication do customers want, how often do they want it? What do they want us to say?

One of the things I would say is I think we sometimes focus too much on trying to fix the problem, so fix the pipe and get the people there, and I think we've got a lot to do on making sure that we focus more effort into communicating more often to customers, to let them know what's going on, what's going to happen next and doing that in a way that each customer wants different types of communication so to Nicola's point, one of the things we've learned recently is going out and speaking to customers following different events that might have happened, actually a lot of the local hubs and communities and councillors in areas have got access to information.

So we've been doing a lot of work to make sure we can link in there so actually, we can talk to customers via other routes that they get information, particularly when you talk about the vulnerable, which was part of the question, how are we going to get to vulnerable customers? Because some of those channels and ways of communicating might not work for everybody so it's how do we get access to those that might not have a mobile phone, for example, and give an update. I've just seen a pop-up on time but I can keep going.

**CCW Chair:** I'll give you an extra 30 seconds, if there's something particular you want to add?

**Matthew Pinder:** I would just say the website needs work, we are going to be doing some work over this next year, we are testing different channels and different methods going via councillor hubs, and talking about the WhatsApp pilot which I think is important so we understand the testing, but I think the important part is we've done a lot of work and a lot of listening with customers to understand when they do contact Yorkshire Water about a particular problem, how is that communication for them going to work? What do they want?

And also, there's different types of things people get in touch with, so if it's a public health issue for water quality, that's really important about how we make sure customers understand that, versus reporting a leak that you might have walked past walking your dog, for example. That was all I wanted to say, to build on.

**CCW Chair:** Thank you for that response, I didn't need to interrupt at all because you were answering the question, so thank you for that. We're now going to have a pause from Nicola and Matthew, and we're going to turn back to customers. Sam is now going to guide the discussion and draw out some specific actions and plans that we can take forward, and then we'll come back to Nicola and Matthew in about 10 minutes.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thanks Rob, thanks Nicola and Matthew for the response there. For this section, we're really focused on your reaction to what you've just heard from Yorkshire Water, so we're not looking for any new questions at this point. I want you to have a think about all the different things and actions that they're currently doing and also what they're hoping to do in the future. I want you to think, was there anything that felt clear and concrete and good? Or anything that felt a bit vague, uncertain or needs to be expanded on? Importantly as well, if there was anything missing from their list of actions that you still want to see from Yorkshire Water, moving forward.

We'll open up the conversation and we can have a bit of a discussion. I'll start with Community Member 12, to see what you thought of the response to your question. I know that you live close to vulnerable customers and things like that, which was why this question was important to you. Can we start with you?

**Community Member 12:** Yeah, that's fine. I liked the new initiatives that they were speaking over, obviously the biggest one would be obviously with some vulnerable customers, they don't have family or anything and so I'm always updating them. I think linking up with councils and NHS doctors' surgeries, that would be something that could work, another way of accessing customers. If there's an issue or a water cut, how would they reach out to that customer urgent?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Is there an action then that you'd want to put forward as a potential thing that they could be doing?

**Community Member 12:** Potentially, if they've got a kind of list where they have updated their systems, they have got a way of contacting customers, even getting their ... making sure somehow, making that contact, even if it's someone they have lined up in the street,

someone that's volunteered that if any issues happen, I can ... so it's mainly: are they reaching out to the person on time or is this person having to ring six hours later or day after, "I've had issues, I've not had no water and it's affected my health" or whatever.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you so much. I'm going to open it up now and see if there's anything anyone wants to put forward. A good way of doing this is if you raise your hand on Zoom, it might be easier. So I can see Community Member 10 and Community Member 3, we'll start with Community Member 10.

**Community Member 10:** Nicola was saying, "We don't have everyone's mobile, we don't have everyone's email address", what they've got for every consumer is an actual address, so anything that's important, okay, you can't write to someone and say, "Your water was switched off yesterday and we're switching it back on" but critical things in terms of development and initiatives they're taking, something important can be posted out. It's in the hands of the Post Office then of course, but that's the one piece of information that they do have for every consumer.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So what would your action be then, Community Member 10? What would you want them to do?

**Community Member 10:** I don't know how regular but certainly an annual update, by mail, snail mail, stating what their initiatives have been put in place and identifying how the money is being spent and probably a breakdown, I've seen it somewhere, a breakdown of how each pound that you pay is broken down.

**TMcK Facilitator:** We'll cover some of that in the question as well that's around bills and value for money too, thanks for bringing that up. Community Member 1, over to you.

**Community Member 1:** I thought something that were really good what they said was putting pop-up stalls in the streets, in certain towns and stuff because that way then, the people who don't have smartphones and email addresses, that's a way of reaching out to them. I found it quite good that they're looking at reaching out to everyone, not just people with emails and phone numbers.

**TMcK Facilitator:** What would you want to get out of the pop-up stalls and things like that? Think about how often you'd want them or where they would be, what would they look like?

**Community Member 1:** I think definitely at least annually, even if it's just a couple of people from Yorkshire Water, sort of having a pop-up stall, if you have any queries or questions or if you have any problems with the source, just sort of that support network for especially the elderly and vulnerable who don't have a way of contacting them, that's then an outlet for them to be able to contact them.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How would they go about communicating the stalls or events to yourself but also to vulnerable people?

**Community Member 1:** Like Community Member 10 said, I think it would be a good idea to maybe a couple of weeks before, sending it out in the post to the people who are local because that way, it gets out to everybody, so then they're aware of when it's happening, what time it's happening and what they can go up and ask at these stalls.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, Community Member 10, some good actions off the back of that, I can see my team typing away. Community Member 6?

**Community Member 6:** I really liked the idea of going into schools as well, I think that's really good to kind of introduce at a younger age, the importance of water and the work that Yorkshire Water does, and I wondered if that was something that could be potentially worked with in collaboration with workplaces as well, to try and continue that education through adulthood.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, we can definitely put that action forward. Community Member 9, you've got your hand up.

**Community Member 9:** Yes, I just wanted to say that I heard a lot of positive things there that I'm quite happy about from the water board, but particularly like Community Member 6 has just said about the children, you know, they are going to be the future, they are the people that will be the gatekeepers of the environment and community, so I really like that idea of going into the schools. I was just wondering as an action, do they have a dedicated section for vulnerable people? If something happens, "Are you free for an hour, could you sort this out?", that sort of mentality, where there's a dedicated team that can respond and even if it's dropping, actually hand delivering letters to the list of vulnerable people that they know don't have an email or don't have a mobile phone, just to improve that somehow, like a dedicated team.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's a great action, thank you. Community Member 8, you had your hand up?

**Community Member 8:** Mine was really similar to what Community Member 9 was saying actually, that there needs to be some sort of system where we can actually identify vulnerable people, and then being able to have some sort of notification of how they would actually like to be notified – because they might not be able to go to some of these community events or see these publicity campaigns, which I agree are important, so they can actually be quite isolated and they may have to depend on other people. So I think if there was some sort of register or something of vulnerable people that Yorkshire Water could contact directly?

**TMcK Facilitator:** What action are you putting forward for them? I've got "have a system in place and then also find out what sort of notifications they want"?

**Community Member 8:** What would suit them, yes.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How do they do that? How can we form that into an action?

**Community Member 8:** I don't know, I don't know how you identify vulnerable people, I don't know whether you'd do it through the GPs or something? I don't know. But some sort of system, there must be ways that people are identified, that are vulnerable, it would be almost like not duplicating but linking in with some of the information that's already out there.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Of course, thank you. Community Member 12, you've got your hand up again?

**Community Member 12:** With a priority services register, maybe people that have missed payments or have had a family crisis that gets them onto the priority services register, so all the vulnerable, once they make that contact, it's getting them registered on that. You know when they said about having a dedicated service or staff, obviously putting those staff in training to actually deal with the vulnerable, that's maybe a gap that they could look at, training the frontline staff, recognising hidden vulnerabilities which could be mental health, literacy, language barriers, having dedicated services for these people. Then we mentioned about joining partnerships and this could be debt advice organisations,

charities, social services and other ways of tracking people's calls, vulnerable and improving by looking at resolution times.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, you've thought about your actions.

**Community Member 5:** My question was yes, it was really interesting, listening to what Yorkshire Water had to say. Now with regards to the website, we've mentioned it and they've acknowledged it but how long has that been an acknowledgement, where they're aware of it? And where are they at with it at the moment? I'm sure it's not just today that they're talking about the website being re-looked at, what is their plan? How long is it going to take for them to get that up and running again?

**TMcK Facilitator:** We can turn this question into an action, they said that they're reviewing the website and making changes and things like that, what action would you want them to do?

**Community Member 5:** I'd like them to tell us where they are at with it and how long has that process taken so far?

**CCW Chair:** So perhaps give a timeline, Community Member 5, of when they'll deliver it?

**Community Member 5:** Yes, a timeline of when they're going to deliver and how long have they been looking at this already?

**TMcK Facilitator:** So outline some clear timelines and the progress that they've made?

**Community Member 5:** Yes.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Community Member 3, you had your hand up?

**Community Member 3:** I'm agreeing with what Community Member 5 was saying, when she mentioned it, she said "We're changing the website and it's going to take a year or two", what does that mean? My initial question is regarding the hubs, when Community Member 7 were talking, how would people know to go there? So I would imagine now someone would go into your council hub and say, "I've got this problem with Yorkshire Water", so the council would respond, "You need to phone Yorkshire Water." If they're going to change that, how are they going to let people know that? And once people are there, going to the council with problems around Yorkshire Water, how are they going to capture them people? I've seen this work before, they just need to do it right and I'll be interested in how they're going to do it.

**TMcK Facilitator:** I've got two follow-up questions for you then. The first part of what you're saying is they said one or two years, do you have a timeframe that you would want them to have the website refreshed and things like that by?

**Community Member 3:** Within six months, why does it take a year or two? Why can't they get someone on it now? And like Community Member 5, how long have they known that the website's not very good?

**TMcK Facilitator:** My second question for you, when you talked about how do people know to go to these hubs, what could they do to help people know to go to the hubs? What could we put as an action for that?

**Community Member 3:** Like somebody said, they could liaise with GP surgeries. Another good way as well is those post office banking hubs, a lot of, I won't say vulnerable, I'd better say "elderly" because not every elderly person is a vulnerable person but a lot of the elderly

who still deal with cash and pay their bills manually, attend those banking hubs, so there could be information there, at the council hubs, in your doctors' receptions, things like that.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Some good actions off the back of that, thank you. Community Member 7, you've got your hand up?

**Community Member 7:** Yes, I just wanted to go on what Community Member 3 said about the one year, it all seems very vague and they're not really telling us anything, it's like they're kicking the can down the road a little bit. Then they mentioned the WhatsApp pilot without any substance behind it, so I'd be interested to find out what that entails. Also the fact that they've got everybody's address, they could write to everybody and ask them how they would prefer to be communicated with. The trouble with firms nowadays is they're trying to go paperless and they seem a bit reluctant to send out more paperwork but in that instance, it would be good if they could send it out to everybody, it would hit the vulnerable people as well and they could all reply back by email or email or however they want, to see how they want to be communicated with in the future and it could all go on their database.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So an opt-in approach to that?

**Community Member 7:** Yes.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Community Member 12, you've been putting some things in the chat so I'm going to read these out. You've said introduce a feedback loop, resolution times for vulnerable customers, trigger early support after missed payments or repeated contact, running targeted campaigns with council and community partners and maybe also assist with digital help for those who need it, if possible. Thank you for that. Community Member 10, finish us off for this part.

**Community Member 10:** It's just on the back of what people have been saying about timescales, etc. I worked in a sales environment for 40 odd years and one of the things that we have in any project or any sale that we made, was SMART objectives, it's a mnemonic which is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based. So we couldn't get away with saying one or two years, we had to say "March 2026" or "November 2027", and I don't know how commonly known this is because it comes from the environment that I worked in but I think it's something that if they're not aware of it, they should be and make these objectives specific, measurable, time-based and be able to communicate where they are at any stage of that development.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, you've introduced the next section, so when you see my screen, you'll see all the actions that have been put forward, both from the water company today, what they're going to do in the future and also what an ideal water company response would look like, based on what we've discussed. There's also an option for timescales, so if there's anything that you would want seen by a specific timeframe, we can put that forward to Yorkshire Water, or when they get their summary report, they will be putting forward timescales for what they think is achievable for each of the actions.

I'm just going to share my screen again. We've got a lot on the list of what Yorkshire Water said they're currently doing and what they'll do in the future, but I want to focus mainly on the ideal water company response. These are new actions that you as customers have put forward this evening.

Number 1 is provide firm timelines around the delivery of website refresh, ideally within six months if possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Action point A

Dedicated support team for vulnerable customers.<sup>2</sup>

Running targeted campaigns and linking up with council, NHS, GPs and community partners to better identify and communicate with vulnerable or hard to reach customers.<sup>3</sup>

Maintaining list and contact preferences of vulnerable customers.<sup>4</sup>

Providing annual updates on key information via mail, and that would include information about investment, initiatives and ongoing works.<sup>5</sup>

Also by extending what they already have within schools, so their school aged outreach systems and extend that into the workplace and higher education.<sup>6</sup>

Put up pop-up stalls at least annually in the street to reach vulnerable people or those who may not have email addresses or mobile phones. Send postal notifications to people in the area a couple of weeks in advance, including details about when the pop-up will be happening, what time and also what topics will be discussed or what questions they can put forward and what will get answered.<sup>7</sup>

Also add customers who miss payments or experience family crisis to the priority services register or identify vulnerable customers by collaborating with debt advice organisations, charities and social services.<sup>8</sup>

Trigger early support after missed payments or repeated contact.<sup>9</sup>

And finally, provide training for frontline staff on recognising hidden vulnerabilities.<sup>10</sup>

Well done, you've come up with a lot of actions there. I'll pass the conversation back over to you all again. I want you to think what we've put forward, is there anything that you would want to be made clearer? Anything specifically you'd want to see time bound? Or if there's anything missing that we've talked about, that the team haven't quite captured in a way you would want it to be?

**Community Member 5:** The timeline for what I and a couple of others asked is fine, six months I think is more than enough time to update a website. For me, that would be great, if we could have some sort of a response on that.

**TMcK Facilitator:** We'll keep in six months for the website refresh and see what Yorkshire Water come back with. Anyone else? Is there anything missing or needing expanding on?

**Community Member 3:** I think the training's important and the partnership work with councils and NHS, how long is that going to take? Say like Yorkshire Water want to do it tomorrow, how long is it going to take the council to get on board or vice versa?

**TMcK Facilitator:** How long do you think? What would you expect it to take?

**Community Member 3:** The sooner the better, they need to get on with that but I don't know. Anything to do with Governments seems to take forever to implement.

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2 Action point B  
3 Action point C  
4 Action point D  
5 Action point E  
6 Action point F  
7 Action point G  
8 Action point H  
9 Action point I  
10 Action point J

**TMcK Facilitator:** We can put that forward to Yorkshire Water and see if they have a timescale in mind. Thank you, Community Member 3. Anybody else?

**Community Member 12:** They've mentioned the WhatsApp and comms channels but there's not enough emphasis on offline or hard to reach customers.

**TMcK Facilitator:** What point are you referring to?

**Community Member 12:** I was only listening to it, I can't really see on the screen.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's okay, so more emphasis on reaching vulnerable customers. I think there's a point in D<sup>11</sup> about vulnerable customers and C<sup>12</sup> as well, using different campaigns to link up with council, NHS, GP and community partners.

**Community Member 9:** There's going to be hundreds and thousands but they'll have so many thousands that aren't a problem, they can contact them, they're online and they can almost sift every one of them out and then concentrate on the pool of people that are left, that are vulnerable, that dedicated department to work on that quickly.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So Point B, dedicated support team for vulnerable customers, so they can help identify as well. Thank you. Any final comments from any of you community members before we pass over to Rob?

**CCW Chair:** Thank you, everyone, I think there's some great actions there. Before we finalise them of course, we need to give Yorkshire Water a brief opportunity to highlight if there are any commitments they think aren't feasible and if they aren't, to explain why, if there are any constraints, whatever the financial regulatory or legal or whatever they are, tell us transparently what they are and of course, any explanations they give us will be recorded and published in the transcript. If I could go back to Nicola and Matthew, and see whether they think these are practical and reasonable requests?

**Nicola Shaw:** Thank you, it's been really interesting to see the requests so thank you for showing them to us. The answer is there are some things here that we already do, I don't think we could cover everything that we were doing in that opening statement, I don't want you to think if we come back with an action plan, "You're already doing that, you haven't told us about it", so in the five minutes, I don't think we've covered everything we do. But in principle, it looks really doable as a list.

In terms of the things you mentioned about I said we were doing something over the next year in relation to the website, that's because we're doing, what we call, refreshing it all the time if you like, we're doing small sprints that say, "We found this problem, we're going to fix this problem, we're going to deal with it and move on", so you'll see the website evolve over the year. Tackling the things that come up the most for our customers, changing those, then changing the next thing, then changing the next thing because we have a team of people working on the website in the background.

Somebody mentioned SMART goals and objectives, absolutely we use those too and that's something we work on in the organisation, so when we come back with our final response, I think we should work as much on that, so tell you when we're doing something that's on the list already, we'll say we're doing it already and explain how we do it. We have about 330,000 people on our priority services register, so those are the people who need special support from us in all sorts of different ways and we send out letters, for example, once a

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<sup>11</sup> Maintaining list and contact preferences of vulnerable customers

<sup>12</sup> Running targeted campaigns and linking up with council, NHS, GPs and community partners to better identify/ communicate with vulnerable/hard-to-reach customers

year to everyone with their bill on how we invest and where we're investing coming up, what we spend money on, and that is a physical letter that comes through everybody's letterbox, unless they've said already that they want a digital copy rather than through the letterbox. We also send a letter to everybody before we actually do work in their area, so if we're going to do some work on their street or in a street nearby, we send people a letter, we spend a lot of money with the post office, they do very well out of us, in order that we do get the information.

But one of the things I think we should think a bit more about is can we link that, what people tell us on the priority services register, so if they need their bill in Braille, for example, or in large print. That's what we do in the bill and I'm not convinced we're linking that across to what we do where we're working. So we'll give some thought to each of the areas you've talked about and try and set out a specific action plan when we come back, if that's all right.

**CCW Chair:** What do customers think of that response? Is that satisfactory? Has that told you enough? Obviously, universal approval, which is great.

**Community Member 5:** I think it's great to hear that the website is evolving so it's not going to be it needs to be fixed and will be fixed within six months, it's more a case of what I'm understanding, it's evolving so things will be happening all the time with it, which is really good to hear.

**CCW Chair:** In that case, I'll say thank you to everyone and for the record, we've now agreed those actions for this question because I think we've agreed they're all doable, noting that Nicola has said that some of them are underway anyway, but we can establish that we go forward over the next couple of weeks. With that, we'll move onto the next question which is going to be asked by Community Member 1, we'll put the question up on screen for you and off you go.

**Community Member 1:** We understand that investment is needed but we feel bill rises are not being explained clearly enough. We want to know why bills are going up, what our money is being spent on and what support is available for those who are struggling to pay.

How will Yorkshire Water clearly explain rising bills and show customers what their money is paying for? And the second reason is make support easier to access for households who are struggling.

**CCW Chair:** Thank you, Community Member 1, we'll put that question in the chat so that it's there all the time. In responding, please Yorkshire Water, focus on the question, you've got five minutes with a little bit of flexibility to answer it, so over to you and Nicola, and it's also Matthew again. Please go ahead.

**Nicola Shaw:** I'm not surprised that people want to know about why the bills are going up because they've gone up significantly over the last two years. That follows a period of about 10 years when they weren't going up, in fact they weren't keeping pace with inflation and our costs were going up ahead of that. It also follows a period in which what everybody wants from our water network collectively in Yorkshire and in the country as a whole, has increased and at a time when the climate's changing so the demands on us have increased.

I totally understand why people want to understand but also what we need to do to invest. The money that people pay us is going directly to invest in the network, to improve the outcomes that customers want to see and we do let people know about that, as I said when we spoke on the last message, we send a message every year with the bill saying how is the bill broken down, what do we spend it on? And giving some illustration on a regional basis, of the particular projects that we're going to be spending money on in the coming

year. So for example, we're spending about £1.5bn over the five years from 2025 to 2030, on reducing the number of discharges from combined sewer overflows, that's what people talk about, about spills into the river from sewage and that, we're reducing that by about 50% in Yorkshire by 2030, so a big step change in the outcome.

Similarly, we're putting a lot of money into reducing leakage, partly by replacing water mains, replacing about 1,000 kilometres, we have about 32,000 kilometres of water mains across Yorkshire, we're going to replace about 1,000 kilometres<sup>13</sup> of that in the next five years, so trying to give you illustrations of the things that we're investing in. I'm going to ask Matt to talk a bit more in detail about those two things or anything he wants to cover about what we're paying for.

The other thing that we do is try and make sure that households who are struggling are really aware of the support that's available to them, and we do that in conjunction with debt agencies, we do it in conjunction with NGOs, people who would support, charities who will support people, particularly of course, Citizens Advice but anybody else who is giving advice in the area, and with local government and we have some direct connections in with them for some of the schemes, where you get direct support if you are receiving certain benefits.

So we have a range of options available to support people and we're able to support about 385,000 customers, I think. Our prediction is that anybody who is on a low income should be able to get some support from us to be able to pay their bill, to help them as they do that, so there are lots of options available. But as you know, because the question is make it easier to access it, so the first thing is you can call, anybody can call us, we're working hard with the local authorities to make it more known that all of this is available and anything you can do to help us promote that and promote people's understanding would be really useful. Matt, is there anything you wanted to add on any of that?

**Matthew Pinder:** Yes, just thanks for the question, just to build on that. So this year, over 200,000 customers in the last year have been supported, which is around £60m worth of financial support for the customers that Nicola mentioned there on a low income. But we have a number of support schemes, so it's not just about low income, we have schemes that support customers who may have three children in the household or more, so there's a number of different support schemes we have and definitely we'd encourage people to get in touch to talk to us about what might be suitable for their circumstances.

I think it's important just to reference that work that we do with a number of different parties, the charities because there's always more you can do but we continually try to push how we get access to the right customers in Yorkshire, to make sure they understand what is available to them, so we can have those conversations about what support we can provide to them.

**Nicola Shaw:** Maybe I could add two more things, one is in relation to meters, we have a mechanism where if you are worried about your bill, we can move you to a meter so you can measure how much water you're consuming and if you have a small household, it is highly likely that you'll be better off if you move to a meter. But we give you a two-year guarantee that if that doesn't happen, we'll move you back to the other way of billing which is based on rateable value, something that's really old, that if that's better for you, we'll move you back within the first two years. And then the second thing is that we're part of a wider programme with the whole of the water industry, promoting The Big Upgrade, which is all of the changes we're making on both clean and waste water to improve the networks and improve the service that we offer, and we have a similar way of advertising that across the country and we're making sure we promote that on all forms of media, whether that's the

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<sup>13</sup> Yorkshire Water have confirmed 1,085km of water pipe is being replaced

television, with newspapers, local newspapers, local authorities' mailing lists, all sorts of ways and through social media, trying to make sure people understand better what we're spending their money on.

**Matthew Pinder:** And the final one I would just add is we also do a lot of work to help with what ways customers can save water, which ultimately reduces their bill. So what advice can we give? There's lots of tips and hints, it's on the website but more than happy to talk people through the different ways that they can save money, in terms of the ways they use water in the house.

**CCW Chair:** Okay, that's time up on that, thank you again for your response, I think that was pretty clear. We're now going to again pause and listen to what customers have to say about those responses, so back to you, Sam.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, Rob. So again, I really want you to all think about what you just heard from Yorkshire Water, I want you to think what felt clear and concrete but also what felt vague or uncertain and importantly, what was missing? What did you really want Yorkshire Water to say that they're doing or in the future will be doing for this? I'll start with Community Member 1 because you asked the question, how did you find that response?

**Community Member 1:** I found it really reassuring that they're working in relation with debt agencies, local authorities and stuff, so I think that's really good. I think also going through the investments and the numbers with us, I feel like that could be something they could also publish on the website or a newsletter, etc., so everyone knows it and also the support that's available because I always just thought it was support for low income, etc., but it's handy to know it's not just for low income, it's other people who also qualify, so I think it should be a very well-known subject.

**TMcK Facilitator:** That's interesting, I guess it goes back to communication in that you're pleased to hear they're doing all these things but you don't really know about them. What action could we put forward then, based on that?

**Community Member 1:** I think we could also tie it in with the last question which was with the website and always evolving, they could maybe have a certain section on the website what is dedicated to support, and then another one which is dedicated to investments.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you. Anyone else have anything to say about what they've heard? Community Member 3?

**Community Member 3:** I were interested in the support for people on low income, how do people know what a low income is? You might have two parents who are working, so you just assume you're not entitled to anything, how do Yorkshire Water themselves communicate that to the customers?

**TMcK Facilitator:** How would you want that to be communicated or how can we turn that into an action?

**Community Member 3:** They could write to you, somehow with all the services they provide, all the advertisements and that, they could get that message across to people. You might not technically be on a low income but you might have three disabled kids, so you might be a higher earner but you've got three disabled kids, so that might make you qualify for some support from Yorkshire Water. I wouldn't know where to get that information from now, so if I were going to tell somebody, "You might be eligible for something from Yorkshire Water", I wouldn't know how to tell them.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How would you want to find out that information? If you're in that situation, you'd be looking for that information, where do you want to go? Where do you want to find it?

**Community Member 3:** It could be on the radio – they're on the radio quite often, Yorkshire Water – it could be on your bill, it could be sent to you in a letter, an email, a text or it could be advertised, all the usual suspects, all the usual forms of communication.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Community Member 12, over to you.

**Community Member 12:** Apologies if I missed it so the question I didn't get, or the answer I couldn't pick up is, I didn't get it, still why the bill was going up, it didn't really answer why our bill is going up, why is our bill increasing? Is it because of XYZ? I got the investment part of it but I didn't get still why the bills were going up.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How would you want ...?

**Community Member 12:** Again, it comes back to the vulnerable ones, they clearly stated that signposting customers but it's not about signposting, I think the question reflects on what this person just said earlier, how do we find these customers? Signposting them or how do they know they're low income or the vulnerable ones? Again, with bills going up, what have they done to make the contact with vulnerable customers that are actually vulnerable? I get it, obviously if you looked on the internet, my bill is increasing and it will say on investments but again, I'm not coming too harsh but ...

**CCW Chair:** Are you looking for specifics, Community Member 12, on what the investments are? How they're affecting your local area and things like that?

**Community Member 12:** Yeah, more specifics and why our bills are going up, if they're clearly stating it's on the website, "In the area, this is the reason bills are going up" then yeah, it probably answers people's questions.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How would you want to receive that information?

**Community Member 12:** For the vulnerable, it would have to be through council and partnership and doctors' surgeries, whatever, but for us guys, it could be through WhatsApp, like they said earlier, or it could be on the internet, social media. I said that thing on the last one, probably TikTok is the best platform at the moment, even if it was Yorkshire Water have their own standard TikTok channel and they can start talking about different people from different areas, and what support they've got for the vulnerable. Because even if they're vulnerable, I know on TikTok, I'm sure the family will be on it, the kids will be on it and someone will send that message through and nowadays, you can share videos from TikTok to WhatsApp, so that would probably ... because people want to see real people talking from that department, that might help.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, that's an action we can definitely put forward. Community Member 1, your hand's back up.

**Community Member 1:** It were just back to the point of what Community Member 3 said about knowing if you're low income, etc., which I think were a very good point. Something that would be handy and I see it a lot, say if you're looking at a mortgage, there's a calculator on the website, so if Yorkshire Water could have that where you have your combined household income and then you calculate it, then that could be an easy, good way of putting across whether you're eligible for something.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So benefits calculator type thing for your water?

**Community Member 1:** Yeah, and then you can have dropdown options underneath saying if you have anyone vulnerable in the house, how many kids you have, if you're disabled, like a questionnaire kind of thing on the website and then you calculate it and see if you're eligible for any support from Yorkshire Water.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Anyone else have anything to add? I just have a point to raise, Nicola was talking about making things easy to access and brought up about they have a phone number and you're able to call them if you need any help or support, and you can get in touch to find out about support with your bills and things like that. Is that enough to make things easier to access or is there anything else that we can put forward?

**Community Member 5:** One thing I realised when the Yorkshire Water lady was talking about the website, is that we haven't asked her about the actual Yorkshire Water app because that could be another form of communication. I think during the last briefing session, I can't remember whether we said it was there and it wasn't up and running, or it just wasn't there at all? But that could be a good form of communication, as well as other forms that we've spoken about.

**Community Member 3:** Just to add to what Community Member 1 was saying, it got me thinking, when you first create your account with Yorkshire Water, let's say you've moved into your first house and you've started to pay your own bill, they could ask you there what your income details are and other family issues and things, so they've got the information there when you're starting the account up, so they could tell you, say "You're classed as someone on a low income, therefore we can deduct your bill."

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, so do the groundwork when you're applying, when you're online.

**Community Member 3:** It's a way of getting all the information there and then, straightaway, right from the start.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, that's a good action, thank you for putting that forward.

**Community Member 12:** You said about the phone call, is that the only way?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Is there anything else that we could suggest?

**Community Member 12:** Prior to this, that could be one of it, I don't know if they've got the list they deliver the vulnerable but I just think that you know, customers, what's their feedback? Probably asking Yorkshire Water, customers are calling, how long are they holding on the line for? Is that only the best way of contacting Yorkshire Water? Have they got online access where someone can go online and chat to someone? Not these chatbots, proper real people, assistance, some people don't feel comfortable speaking on the phone as well and that could be the vulnerable or people that suffer from anxiety and depression, maybe having some other kind of contact links, whether that's through the internet or WhatsApp. WhatsApp, I think that's a really good one because people in my area, before COVID, they didn't have smartphones, so they got smartphones, we've got a group chat going on where I'll give them updates, I can record a voice note as well, if it's hard to type and they can listen to it, so maybe WhatsApp is another way of having a channel where they can take pictures if they've got a problem with their leak or whatever, or issues with the bill.

**TMcK Facilitator:** I'm conscious we've swayed the conversation back to the topic of communication, which is great and we've got lots of actions on that so before I share my screen and show you all the actions that we have put forward, I just want to go through the two points of the question that we asked, to make sure that we've covered all the actions that we want to cover. The first point was about clearly explaining rising bills and showing

customers what their money is paying for, and also to make support easier to access for households who are struggling. Is there any other actions or points we want to put forward about those two points there?

**Community Member 11:** Just very quickly on that first part of the question, an action I would want to see is more direct to consumer communication rather than social media, rather than any sort of news platform. A lot of people such as myself wouldn't have time to pick up on that, I'd want to see it in the inbox via an email or newsletter style, just showing exactly what the bill allocation is and the percentage is. I think it was mentioned that there's 1,000 kilometres of water main being replaced, I would love to know that information and have that delivered to me on a regular-ish basis.

**TMcK Facilitator:** What's regular-ish and how would you want it delivered?

**Community Member 11:** Quarterly would be fine, via email, the once-a-year annual bill is probably not enough, especially with how much bills have risen as Nicola touched on, we want justification.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Any final comments before I go through all the actions?

**CCW Chair:** Community Member 11, you want justification, does that mean you want to know about the delivery as well?

**Community Member 11:** Absolutely, I think it's all-encompassing, Nicola said the bills barely rose for what, five, six, seven years and now we're seeing quite big jumps, we definitely want to see where that's been allocated and where it's been delivered by the business.

**CCW Chair:** How would you like that, you'd probably want email I guess but for others in other ways?

**Community Member 11:** Yes, email would definitely work best for someone such as myself and again, quarterly would be more than adequate I would have thought.

**TMcK Facilitator:** I'm going to share my screen and go through the actions that have been put forward for this. I won't go through what Yorkshire Water have said they're currently doing and what they plan on doing in the future, I'll stick with what you think an ideal water company response would look like.

Lots of actions on the screen, I'll read through them and then open up the conversation just to see what your thoughts are.

First of all, having a section of the website dedicated to support and another dedicated to explaining investment.<sup>14</sup>

Providing customers with specifics, so how do investments affect them and their local area?<sup>15</sup>

Asking for customer information at first point of contact to better understand requirements, and target support mechanisms to those who need it.<sup>16</sup>

Communicate with customers to let them know whether they would qualify for support and this could be done by email, text or letter.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Action point A  
15 Action point B  
16 Action point C  
17 Action point D

Provide a calculator on the website with options to select whether you have children, are on benefits, live with a disability and also input household income and any other markers there, to check whether you are eligible for any support.<sup>18</sup>

Ensure vulnerable customers can contact Yorkshire Water via a chat, not a chatbot but a real person or WhatsApp, as they might not be comfortable speaking on the phone.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, more direct to consumer information, for example, email or post, potentially quarterly and that would include a clear breakdown about how money is spent<sup>20</sup> on delivery, bills, investment and that kind of thing.

I'll leave the actions up on the screen but I just want you all to have the chance to see if there's anything that you'd want expanded on, if there's anything missing or any final comments before we hand back over to Yorkshire Water?

**CCW Chair:** Sam, just before people come in, we talked about the app and Nicola can correct this if we haven't got this right, but our understanding is the Yorkshire Water dedicated mobile app has been discontinued, so they instead are directing people to the website for all account management needs, but we can clear that up when Nicola and Matthew get a chance in a minute.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, Rob.

**Community Member 5:** I did have a quick look and there isn't a Yorkshire Water app, so that makes sense.

**TMcK Facilitator:** In terms of these actions on the screen here, what's everyone's thoughts? Have we covered everything that we discussed or is there anything still to put into this list?

**Community Member 1:** No, I think we've covered everything.

**CCW Chair:** Are you happy with them?

**Community Member 1:** Yeah, definitely happy with them, they're very clear.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thanks everyone, back to you, Rob.

**CCW Chair:** Great, thanks Sam and thank you to everyone for great contributions that were made there. So, to Nicola and Matthew, that's what your customers think but before we finalise the actions, we just need to get your feedback as to whether they're doable, practical, acceptable, obviously again, if they're not, please give us a reason why. Great, over to Nicola and to Matthew.

**Nicola Shaw:** Thanks, Rob. It was a lot of stuff there so you had me really thinking, thank you. On the first one, the website, dedicated for support and dedicated for explaining investment, we do have two pages, one that's called Help Paying Your Bill and one that's called Investing in Yorkshire, so we have got those already. Obviously, if it's not popping up to people enough, we'll have to review that but we do have those pages.

You are right, that we haven't been continuing with our dedicated app, we didn't get much take-up and so we've been investing in other things rather than things that people weren't really supporting, that's why we have let that go.

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18 Action point E

19 Action point F

20 Action point G

In terms of the calculator that you proposed for the website, one of the things we're worried is that we might so simplify it, that people who are able to get support, might not achieve it if we're not careful, we'll give a more thought to that idea. I like the concept but we don't want to do it so it puts people off because it is quite a complicated calculation, we want to make sure we get people wherever we can rather than losing them in the process. So if people are interested, we will have a think about it and come back to you, it maybe that we determine that isn't feasible because we don't want to put people off who shouldn't be put off.

In relation to, there was one other thing which was sending people something every quarter. What we have already said to our stakeholders is we're going to do a six monthly update document and share that with everybody as widely as possible, but we are not allowed to send what are known as marketing information to everybody in our database, even if we think it's important for them to know because this is seen as marketing of the company, marketing the investment we're doing, we're not allowed to do that unless everybody has signed up to get marketing information from us, and they haven't. So we're giving more thought to what we could do but we will at least be doing a six monthly update on our website in as many channels as we can find, to make sure people get that information if they want to find it, and that people who have signed up for marketing information, do get it.

In relation to vulnerable customers, yes, lots of different ways they can communicate with us and we'll keep working on that in lots of different ways, but I don't think there's anything there other than those things that I've pulled out, that I think are impossible. Matt, I just want to make sure, is there anything I've missed in that?

**Matthew Pinder:** No, I don't think so, I think there's some good ideas, especially on the vulnerable customers, as to how we can communicate with those customers more effectively.

**CCW Chair:** I think that the elves have scribbled those answers down and thank you to all the people behind the scenes, by the way, who are putting all those things down for us because they're doing an incredibly great job in doing that. So you've heard what the company says, are you happy with that explanation? Is it reasonable? And is there anything else you want to add?

**Community Member 1:** I thought it were very good to know as to why some of them points aren't doable and especially with the calculator, sort of putting their perspective on it was very insightful and helpful, and understandable as well.

**CCW Chair:** We're going to move on, we've agreed to most of the actions, subject to what Nicola said about some of the challenges they face, so we will take that into account as we move forward. But we move onto the next question which I believe is Community Member 2.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Just before we do, I need to do a little switch over about who's answering the questions.

**CCW Chair:** Thank you, Matthew, who is stepping out now, I think. We've got Stephanie coming in. Can we have somebody behind the scenes trying to find her? In the meantime, Nicola, would you be happy to cope with the next question going solo for a little bit?

**Nicola Shaw:** Absolutely, Rob, I'll have a go.

**CCW Chair:** Community Member 2, can you ask your question and Sam, if you wouldn't mind putting it up? And maybe if Stephanie could dial off and dial back in?

**Community Member 2:** I've got the question written down, if people want to read the start of it, I will ask the question based on what was written. What will Yorkshire Water do now and in the future to reduce pollution and sewage discharges, make rivers and coastal waters safer and show customers clear evidence of progress?

**CCW Chair:** Community Member 2 is getting you concentrate specifically on the question, so thank you for that. Obviously, customers, if you've got your notepads and note anything down during the answer that you want to come back to later, over to you, Nicola, we'll try and get Stephanie in, in the meantime.

**Nicola Shaw:** That as a matter is close to everyone's heart. In Yorkshire Water, we've set out our mission to do the right thing for the environment and for our customers, so in a sense, we've covered the two things that we as an organisation want to do. We know that we're not doing any of those right at the moment, so we want to get better.

There are three different areas that we're really focused on in relation to rivers and coasts. The first is the combined sewer overflow, this is where we discharge or sewage is spilled from the sewage network, mostly at times when it's raining a lot. I recognise it's not always then but it is mostly, and what we did in the last two years, so up to 2025, up to April last year, we spent £180m at about 100 locations, to improve the outcomes, i.e. reduce the number of discharges and that requires us to either stop storm water getting into the sewage network, or to build extra capacity in the sewage network to deal with times when we've got more water in it.

This is something like six to ten times the normal flow that you'd get on an average day just from building, so you can see the huge variability that comes with the weather. We found that when we did that, we were successful, so as one example, at Dewsbury, we invested in December 2024 and we saw a reduction from 79 spills in 2021, to only 42 spills, so halving that number in 2025. Now you might say "only", that's still a large number, it is but you can see that where we plan to make an investment, we get a benefit and that's at each step and we know we can't do all of this by investing at one location, we've got to do it across the whole network, to grow the capacity of the whole thing.

We're now spending £1.5bn between April last year and 2030, to halve discharges across the whole network, so everywhere will be down by a half. Now, that's a big improvement but a lot of work at about 450 different locations, so lots of work across the whole county.

Secondly, bathing waters, we're really focused on improving quickly, bathing waters because that matters to people on the coast of course, really important for tourism in Yorkshire and for our own selves in wanting to visit the coast, but also inland bathing waters. We've invested a lot at Ilkley, for example, in a number of different locations, to really increase the capacity at Ilkley, ready for the bathing season this year which starts at the beginning of May, goes through to the end of September. It's a really complex programme, as it will be in Scarborough, which is the next area that we're really thinking about how to work on and Knaresborough, all of which have bathing waters.

It's also a complex picture at bathing waters because it isn't only affected by what Yorkshire Water do, it's affected by all sorts of things and so we've been in partnership with the local authorities, North Yorkshire Council, East Riding Council, West Yorkshire Council and with the Environment Agency and with universities, the University of York, in some cases, Hull and the University of Newcastle, to look at what's going on in these bathing waters and what affects them the most. We've taken cuttings from seaweed, for example, where you can see changes in the seaweed, what's leading to that and where we're seeing that happen.

We've also done measurements with the Environment Agency on a very frequent basis or a less frequent basis, to try and learn more about what's going on, and there are definitely inputs from agriculture that need to be resolved, there are definitely inputs from sea birds, from harbours and from dogs, our pets all involved, so all of those things have to be sorted out, as well as discharge from the roads and the sewage system. So lots of work going on in partnership across Yorkshire to try and resolve these things, but with our investment coming early in the programme.

Thirdly, we mentioned pollution generally and we've had two relatively bad years in Yorkshire, with a larger number of pollution events in total. A pollution event is whenever there is a discharge from one of our systems from any part of the network that goes into a river or waterway and has an impact on that waterway. So you can see elevated levels of ammonia or other things in the water that are affected or just even a visual impact on the waterway, that counts as a pollution. There are serious pollutions where we affect a waterway for more than 100 metres and both in '24 and '25, we had larger numbers of those than we'd like.

So we're investing heavily to resolve that and the good news is in 2025, we saw a reduction from the first half of the year to the second half of the year, in the number of serious pollution incidents we had. We halved that and we're seeing a continued improvement this year and we've just published, at the end of March, our Pollution Incident Reduction Programme in full, so people can see what we're doing and then hold us to account next year because next year we'll produce a document that says, "This is what happened and this is what we're going to do in the following year to keep improving." Rob.

**CCW Chair:** Great, thanks Nicola. Again, I think that was pretty clear. So Sam, do you want to go back to customers?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Yes, I've double checked as well just to check if Stephanie can be seen on the attendees' list but it's still not showing, so apologies. But thank you so much for your response, Nicola. Again, I really want you to think about what you've just heard, the response that Nicola has put forward in what Yorkshire Water are currently doing and what they're planning on doing in the future, and I really want you to think about if there's any gaps in what you've heard, if there's anything that could be tightened up or anything you'd want see Yorkshire Water do in addition to what they're currently doing, or what they plan to do in the future.

To start us off, I'll go back to Community Member 2 and see what your thoughts were on that response.

**Community Member 2:** My initial thoughts, to me any pollution is serious, it doesn't matter how big or how small, in a full circle, it's all serious and it affects the people, it affects people around those areas immediately, so it doesn't matter how big or how small. And it's just, they throw out amounts of money and you just think, "Who decides what's most important? What areas are most important?". It's still the same old story to me that I've been hearing for 12 months and I haven't seen any improvement in all the money they've either spent, but I'd be interested to know if they do, if this £1.5bn does improve the locations that I visit that are affected, I'd be very interested to see.

But I noticed that Ilkley has been sorted but Scarborough and Knaresborough are still in the pipeline but nothing's being done, this has gone on for 12 months or more. That's all.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay Community Member 2, I hear your frustration, how do we turn that into an action? What can we put forward to Yorkshire Water, based on what you've just said? What would you like to be done off the back of this session today?

**Community Member 2:** It's difficult to explain because my frustration is so high. It's like why has it taken this long for them to realise that what they were doing, I mean is it just heavy rainfall that causes it? Or does somebody that physically press a button and let sewage out into the water courses? I don't really know how it works but surely it's not just dependent, we get enough rain in this country and we have done for years, so to blame it on heavy rainfall due to climate change, to me just seems an easy excuse and I just find it quite difficult to accept because why has it taken them so long to realise this was a problem?

**TMcK Facilitator:** You mentioned that you don't really know how it works, is there an education piece there then?

**Community Member 2:** I've tried to read up on how this water pollution overflow thing works and to be honest it's too technical, I need, probably for a lot of people, they might need it in plain English, how it happens, why it happens and for God's sake, what are they going to do about it? It's all right talking about £1.5bn, I'd like to see £1m being spent in cleaning up Scarborough, that would work, they've got enough people that are prepared to go and put themselves at risk to try and clean up these beaches, but it's the source that's wrong, it's the sources that are wrong.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Okay, thank you Community Member 2, you said an action there which is around that plain English explanation, making it really simplified, so that you can understand why things happen and when they happen and the reasons for them. That's a really interesting action you put forward, thank you so much.

**Community Member 3:** Just touching on what Community Member 2 was saying, I'm quite interested in this part of it all. Rather than go on about money and 2030 and stuff like that, for an action, can they give us a time when it will be safe to swim in the North Sea or swim in River Wharfe?

**TMcK Facilitator:** Two things, what timeline would you like to see and how would you want that communicated with you?

**Community Member 3:** Communicated by all methods, it could be letter, text, email, social media, radio but if it's going to take them two years, then I'd rather them say, "It's not safe now to swim in River Wharfe with your kids, however we are working on it and by 2028, it will be safe." I'd rather them be honest but to give specific dates and times as to when it's going to be clean. Same with Scarborough as well, I visit Scarborough as well, or wherever, I just think it's poor that it was raw sewage on our beaches and in our rivers.

**Community Member 1:** I think a helpful tool would be signposting areas because hearing Community Member 2 at the start, where kids were in Scarborough with pollution on their legs that weren't sad, it shouldn't be up to say Community Member 2 or anyone else putting their kids' safety in their hands, deciding whether it's safe to swim or not, it should be down to Yorkshire Water etc., so signposting the area saying, "This is a heavily polluted area, don't swim in here", and I think that would save a lot of illnesses as well.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So signposting, is there anything else they could do?

**Community Member 1:** They could even create an online tool but I were just trying to think more for the people that might not have access to the online tools, so I think signposting would be the best way to create everywhere, to create safe for everyone.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you so much Community Member 1, some good actions that you've talked about there.

**Community Member 10:** I don't actually feel in my opinion, that it's showing clear evidence of progress. Nicola mentioned the amount of spills had been reduced from 79 to 42, but it's how you report it, that looks like progress. But the amount spilled maybe the same or even more, so reducing the number of spills isn't a metric that appeals to me, if they said, "We had 42 spills of a million litres each" and that's down from 79 spills of half a million each, then the amount spilt is increased, so I think the metric to prove progress needs changing.

**TMcK Facilitator:** What could be done instead?

**Community Member 10:** Just the way it's reported, I don't know if they can gauge, they may know there's a spill, do they know how much that spill was? I think when fines come into the equation, it's based on the amount spilt, so I would feel that if they said yeah, "there was half a billion litres spilt last year and we got that down to 300 million litres," I don't know the quantities involved but that would show progress to me, so I don't think that progress is actually clear, which is what the question states.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Thank you, Community Member 10. Who else wanted to say something?

**Community Member 7:** I'd like to know how they're prioritising which areas they're spending the money on first, I'd like to think that it would be the high traffic areas like Scarborough and Bridlington and the seaside towns that families go, and the kids play in the sea and sand. It would be nice to know if they were prioritising those kind of areas first, the high-volume traffic, to sort those out before other places. But where are they actually spending the money? It was very vague at letting us know, they're saying spending a lot of money, £1.5bn but they're not telling us any specifics.

**TMcK Facilitator:** What action would you want to see off the back of that for your first point, and then for the second?

**Community Member 7:** Maybe on the website, a section going on about the improvements they're making, "we're spending £1.5bn and we're targeting these areas first", like the high traffic areas where families go on holidays and stuff like that.

**TMcK Facilitator:** So knowing that they're going to the local hotspots or the worse areas first, and communicating that on the website?

**Community Member 7:** In the economy and people spending money in England, to try and promote the seashores and get people going out enjoying themselves. If they can portray that they're making them areas better sooner rather than later, it helps everything, people get more holidays and they'll go to these places and enjoy themselves.

**Community Member 1:** It's not really more an action but I also think it were good when they pointed out that they're trying methods first, and then releasing it with more money when they do work rather than putting all the money into one thing, it not working and then they've just wasted a load of money and time. So I do think that's a really good thing what Yorkshire Water are doing, which I think other companies could follow suit from that.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Did you know about that before today?

**Community Member 1:** No, so I think it were very good to learn and very insightful.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Anybody else with their hand up?

**Community Member 5:** I'd like to know where we can access information on the pollution reduction programme that Nicola spoke about.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Where would you want to access that information? What would the ideal look like?

**Community Member 5:** For me, ideally it would be on their website but I don't know if it's available on their website, I can't see it being a very small document so posting it out wouldn't be ideal, emailing wouldn't either so for me, it would be the website.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Anyone else?

**Community Member 11:** I just wanted to touch on Community Member 1's point there about how a lot of testing's being done before implementing these sorts of improvements. One of the actions I'd really like to see carried out by Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency would be all year-round testing of these waters. It is pretty obscene that it's only May to September that these waters are tested, you can never have too much data about these sorts of things and it's such a small window of the year, especially in the least rain affected months, where the spills are perhaps lesser than they would be in the time that they're not being tested. So a real key action that I'd want to see is year-round testing for the whole region, to gather as much data as possible and try and make the actions as effective as possible, what changes they make.

**TMcK Facilitator:** How do they communicate that with you?

**Community Member 11:** I don't think that needs to be communicated to us that that's been carried out, if people are interested in those sort of readings then they may sign up for some sort of, well I think there's already a live, up to date system that can tell you what the readings are. But again, they're only through May to September so for myself, I wouldn't need to be notified because it doesn't directly affect me but perhaps it could be on the same system all year round.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Any other points we want to make or any actions we want to put forward to Yorkshire Water before I share my screen again?

**Community Member 12:** I put it on the message.

**TMcK Facilitator:** You can go ahead and say it if you like.

**Community Member 12:** I was thinking maybe creating a simple online tool showing the sewage spills, so customers can access it. They could put a postcode in and basically get updates through the portal.

**CCW Chair:** Just to let Community Member 12 know, I think all companies now report sewage spills in real time, it would be interesting to hear from Nicola when she comes back, to hear how they do that specifically in Yorkshire. There are a couple of other interesting things that panellists might want to know, the Government has introduced a new requirement for water companies to publish annual plans called Pollution Incident Reduction Plans, I think it's pronounced PIRPs, and also Yorkshire Water do publish a Pollution Incident Reduction Plan every year and I think they've done theirs for 2026 but again, Nicola can confirm if that's a case. Just a few bits of information.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Does anyone have any final comments before I share the actions?

**Community Member 1:** Just about putting communication out there as well, I've found these Accountability Sessions really insightful as to some of the things that are out there. Maybe Yorkshire Water could host a once a month Zoom meeting on different aspects like we've covered today with bills, sewage, etc., with an open room what anyone can join to

get the point across because I've learned so much from these, it's such a shame for other people not to get it across this way.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Stephanie's been identified, I'm going to pop her in the room just now, the representative from Yorkshire Water that's joining.

**CCW Chair:** Just in time for the actions.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Before we go back to Yorkshire Water, we'll go through the actions that we've discussed together. I won't go through what Yorkshire Water are currently doing and what they plan on doing in the future, but we'll go through the actions that you came up with as customers and what an ideal water company response would look like.

Clearly communicate what improvements customers should expect to see delivered throughout the investment timeline.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly communicate whether key deliverables and/or improvements are achieved.<sup>22</sup>

Communicate clearly and frankly on bathing water safety and quality.<sup>23</sup>

Plain English explanation of storm overflows, why and how they happen.<sup>24</sup>

For storm overflows or spills, report metrics such as flow rates and volumes, not just absolute counts.<sup>25</sup>

Signpost the heavily polluted areas and also create an online tool to show where these areas are.<sup>26</sup>

Clarify how Yorkshire Water prioritises the areas to work on first,<sup>27</sup> so is that based on high traffic areas being prioritised or is it heavily polluted areas?

Information about the Pollution Reduction Programme to be provided on the website for those interested.<sup>28</sup>

Year-round testing of waters for the whole region<sup>29</sup>, so it doesn't necessarily need to be communicated to customers but we still want to ensure the testing of waters is happening across the region.

Finally, host a once a month Zoom meeting with an open room where everyone could join in<sup>30</sup>, similar to what we're doing today, about topics that matter to customers like yourselves.

Again, so many actions on these questions which is really great and before we go back to Yorkshire Water for a response, I just want to open up the conversation again to you all community members, is there anything missing or is there anything we want to expand on or any sort of timescales or anything like that before I move back to Rob?

**Community Member 2:** No, thank you. I think we've covered almost everything.

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<sup>21</sup> Action point A

<sup>22</sup> Action point B

<sup>23</sup> Action point C

<sup>24</sup> Action point D

<sup>25</sup> Action point E

<sup>26</sup> Action point F

<sup>27</sup> Action point G

<sup>28</sup> Action point H

<sup>29</sup> Action point I

<sup>30</sup> Action point J

**Community Member 9:** I think it's covered just about everything. I like the last bit that Community Member 1 said about the monthly meetings, a bit like how HMRC will put out an email doing a webinar about expenses or doing a webinar about when your tax return's due, you know, and then people that are interested, access it.

**TMcK Facilitator:** Any other points we want to put forward before I pass back to Rob?

**CCW Chair:** I think we'll move on then, thank you, Sam and thank you to everybody, some great contributions there. So before we finalise the actions, I just want to give Yorkshire Water an opportunity to respond to those potential commitments and obviously, welcome Stephanie, finally, to the meeting, I think she's come in somewhere below.

**Stephanie Pullen:** I'm here.

**CCW Chair:** We'll give you a chance to say anything you want after maybe the initial response comes from Nicola. Nicola, over to you to respond to these.

**Nicola Shaw:** Thank you, you covered a huge amount of ground there, there are some things I want to say specifically, for Community Member 2, we do not have a red button, I have explicitly gone and checked that with people who are involved in running all of the sites, we've been round all of them, there is just no button that we can just slam on. It happens automatically, so that's why it's such a challenge and I thought it might be helpful to illustrate one of those. In Scarborough, in the south side of Scarborough, we put in a big investment in '24 at Wheatcroft, which is just on the south of the South Bay, we invested about £1.8m to more than double the capacity that we had at that location to hold the storm water when it came, and it gave us a 65% reduction in the number of discharges and an 83% reduction in their duration.

Somebody else said, "Could you tell us about how much you lose?" and the answer is no because the monitors don't give us that information, we have these monitors that sit at the top of the tube, the sewage pipe, some of them have to sit opposite because they're right in the middle of a river, some of them sit actually on the pipe or in the pipe, some sit above the pipe because it's open, so there are all sorts of different ways that they sit and they calculate both when it starts and when it stops, so how long it is and obviously therefore we get the number and that's reported on our website all the time. But we can't, from that, calculate the flow because it's a very complicated equation, the flow, and it depends on how deep it is, obviously in the pipe, so we don't have a mechanism at the moment to calculate how much. The answer is we can't at the moment.

We have 2,100 and something storm overflows across Yorkshire, just Yorkshire, we're one of the three largest owners of these combined sewer overflows across the country so I think that explains a bit more about our network.

Plain English explanation, I thought that was a really good idea and we will keep working on that but in plain English, let me reassure you, over 80% of our bathing waters in Yorkshire are good or excellent, there are only four that don't meet the sufficient criteria<sup>31</sup>, so they're all available to swim other than four, and the four are the three inland ones, the one at Ilkley, the one at Wetherby, and the one at Knaresborough, and Scarborough South Beach but because of the investment we made at Scarborough South Beach, that got to "sufficient" last year.

All of these metrics are calculated on a four-year rolling average so if we've made the investment, it takes a long time before it gets up in the scale and one of the things we're

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<sup>31</sup> Yorkshire Water have confirmed: "80% of our bathing waters in Yorkshire are Excellent, Good or Sufficient with only 4 currently rated by the Bathing Water Regulations as 'Poor'"

talking to the Government and the Environment Agency (EA) and local authorities about is, is that right? Or should we be able to make a movement quicker if we make a big investment? The reason that the three inland ones are more difficult is because that requirement came only very recently, relatively recently in the scale of things, I know it's five years at Ilkley, but we've made all of the investment that we've got to make at Ilkley and we don't expect that the waters will get to "good" this year because of everything else that's happening, the agricultural run-off, the run-off from roads and other things, so it shows you what the scale of investment we've got to make across the county is.

We do have on our website, our Pollution Improvement Programme, you can go to [YorkshireWater.co.uk/environment/pollution](http://YorkshireWater.co.uk/environment/pollution), you can see that. We also have a map that shows you whenever we're discharging and it shows you where we're planning to invest, so there's a little dropdown and then we have an investment plan as well on the website.

Having said all of that, I think most of the actions there, we absolutely can do, other than as I said, we cannot do the total volume but other than that, we can. Steph, anything to add?

**Stephanie Pullen:** Thank you very much, it's been great to actually be able to listen to the conversation, both from your start Nicola and all the way to you as customers, talking about the challenges and we absolutely agree that there's more to do and we're not where we want to be particularly on pollutions, and we know that we've got a lot of investment – and you're right in saying it's about making sure that we deliver the outcomes and those are really clearly demonstrated, so Community Member 10, I think you were talking about the volume, what we can look at is duration, so as well as the spill number, we can tell the duration.

For example, one of the areas we've invested in recently is in Beamsley Sewage Treatment Works, and it's gone from spilling, so far this year where it has been wet in the first start of the year, it has had zero spills and so we know that when we put in investment and we make sure that we are on time and we are clear about what we're doing, we can see the improvements in the programme.

I'd also like to touch on what Nicola said about others interacting within the bathing water and how the bathing water is signposted. Our overflow map does indicate when our asset is discharging, the EA issue a pollution risk forecast at seven of our beaches if there has been a storm overflow operating, and the local council would then put signage out to say if the beach is unsuitable for bathing. So there is a lot of effort and energy that goes into making sure that [inaudible] bathing, which is that it is really clear whether it is safe to swim.

But as we've said, there's everything that we need to do in terms of what we do as a water company and the impact we have on the environment, but we also have teams, both river rangers as well as the dedicated bathing water team, that are working alongside other stakeholders to tackle the inputs that they have within the bathing water and river environment as well, so it's really important that we look at this really holistically, but absolutely focusing on what we have to do.

I think Community Member 2, you were talking about the [inaudible] years, I think when we communicate about that plain English about why storm overflows are there but also why sometimes it isn't as easy as being able to fix it tomorrow or in the next year, but actually that some of the investments will take two, three, four years as we design and make sure we do the right thing for the customers, for the environment, but there are interventions that we are making in the network today that are making a difference.

**Nicola Shaw:** Thanks, Steph. Just two more points, Rob. One is hosting a monthly Zoom meeting, we actually do those every six months in the same format as CCW promoted Your

Water Your Say, we do those every six months and we do them on a regional basis so that you tend to get more information that's really specific for where you live, we can't get it down to a village but we do get it down to the four corners of Yorkshire.

And there was one other thing I should raise, how do we prioritise? We are required to prioritise in some ways by the legislation, so we have to reduce the spills at bathing waters further than we do on the rest of the network. We're also required by our regulator to prioritise on bringing down the number, so we have to halve the number by 2030, and then we're required to by the Environment Agency, in relation to the areas that are of special scientific or environmental importance, so we focus on really important rivers or locations. And after that, we have listened to our customers too, where customers say, "In particular, I'm really bothered about this one", then we do further work there. But you can see already, we've got a lot of ways we are required to prioritise by the legislation or regulators.

**CCW Chair:** Thank you. Stephanie, we had a few minor glitches but we're glad we got you here and a few glitches coming through as well, but that will be the Yorkshire internet, I think! In terms of the three to four years you mentioned, I just want to say, I think customers, as long as you're clear to customers about the delivery, when you're going to deliver it and how much investment is going in, I think people will understand, but it's about being clear and transparent about it.

Just going back to customers now, having heard those explanations and heard what Nicola and Stephanie have said, do you feel they're reasonable? Do you think that you're happy with the answers or are there things you want to clarify?

**Community Member 10:** I think limitations have been spelled out to me regarding the comments I made, and I understand that. It's not difficult, the only time you can be absolutely certain is when there are zero spills, but things seem a lot clearer to me after the explanations which I thought were good.

**CCW Chair:** Subject to the limitations that Nicola has outlined, for the record, I think we've agreed pretty much all of those actions, so we can move on from Question 3 and we'll move onto Next Steps. Firstly, Sam, is there anything you want to say before I close?

**TMcK Facilitator:** No, just a massive thank you to everyone that's been involved this evening, both from Yorkshire Water and all the community members on the Water Voice Panel, thank you so much and thank you, Rob, for chairing.

**CCW Chair:** Thank you to everyone and I just have to say what an excellent set of customers Yorkshire Water has. They're lucky to have you and you've covered a lot of ground this evening, some very important themes and I think we've agreed a pretty clear set of actions in response to the issues raised by customers.

All these actions have been captured during the live session and are going to be forming the basis of the company's full response, so in terms of next steps, a full transcript of this session is going to be published by CCW on its website within five working days, so a pretty quick turnaround for that. Before publication, an early draft will be shared with all the participants, so that you can review it and raise any concerns relating to any comments you've made during this evening, and a plain English summary will be published within 10 working days.

Yorkshire Water is required to publish an action plan within 28 [working] days, setting out how it will deliver the commitments it's agreed to tonight. Customers will then be asked whether the action plan accurately reflects what was agreed and CCW will monitor progress and report publicly on the delivery. The whole process is designed to ensure transparency and to get things followed through by the company, not just have a

discussion that goes nowhere. So we want to see real results at the end of this, as everybody does and as the company does, I'm sure.

Finally, I just want to say a big thank you to you all for your time tonight, all the thought you've put into it and the honesty you've brought to the session. Your input is actually what gives this process the real credibility and purpose that we need so thank you all again for your engagement tonight, and I can let you all go four minutes early! Thank you.

[CLOSE]

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