

Summary report

Ad hoc Accountability Session with South East Water

This Accountability Session was arranged to address the water supply issues for South East Water customers around Kent in May during a period of extreme heat.



Ad hoc Accountability Session | Tuesday 30th June 2026

Report published: Thursday 9th July 2026

Community members had the opportunity to question senior executives at South East Water directly and seek clarity on the response to the incident.

They raised the issues that mattered most to them, including how the disruption was being addressed, what action would be taken next and how similar supply issues could be prevented in future. South East Water responded to these questions on the night.

The questions asked by our community members are outlined below and the initial actions discussed in the session are set out on the following three pages.

Q1. Causes, warning signs and lessons from May

“Customers want to understand what caused the May supply issues, what South East Water has learned from them and whether those lessons have already changed how the company prepared for the latest June heatwave.

South East Water has said raw water levels remain in a good position, but that the challenge during very high demand is treating, pumping and refilling drinking water storage tanks quickly enough.

What exactly caused the May incident and when did South East Water first know that treatment, pumping, storage, pressure or local supply capacity could become a risk?
 What has been learnt from the May incident and what did South East Water do differently to prepare for the June heatwave and reduce the risk of further supply interruptions?”

Q2. Short term resilience, restrictions and summer readiness

“South East Water says every available treatment works and source is producing treated water at full capacity, storage tanks were filled as much as possible before the heatwave, leak teams have been increased and water is being re-routed around the network. It is also now bringing in hosepipe restrictions across Kent because demand is still too high.

If all of those measures are already happening, why is Kent still at the point where restrictions are needed and what additional short-term resilience actions will South East Water deliver now - before longer-term infrastructure such as new pipes, extra storage or Broad Oak reservoir are available - to prevent customers experiencing low pressure or no water during the rest of this summer and future heatwaves? As part of this, what is being prioritised immediately to increase resilience, what is being deprioritised or delayed to allow that to happen and when and how will this be made available to customers and CCW so progress can be tracked?”

Q3. Local updates, clear restrictions messaging and customer confidence

“Customers now need clear, local and practical information not only during outages, but also during restrictions.

How will South East Water warn, update and reassure customers at a postcode or local-area level before, during and after incidents and how will it communicate the Kent hosepipe restrictions clearly to all customers, including people who do not use social media or email?

How will South East Water show customers the positive impact their actions are having — for example, whether restrictions are reducing demand, helping storage levels recover and reducing the risk of further low pressure or supply interruptions — and when will this information be published and updated so customers can see the benefits of their actions?”



What happens next?

CCW will send this report to South East Water and ask the company to produce an action plan. This plan should set out how each point will be addressed and when action will be taken. CCW will then share an update with the exact commitments made by South East Water. After this, CCW will monitor progress against each commitment and provide monthly updates, so community members can see what has changed and help prioritise the issues that should be followed up at the Autumn Accountability Sessions.

Causes, warning signs and lessons learned from May

- Publish a customer-facing May incident review setting out the timeline, root cause, affected assets, customer impact, lessons learned and what has changed since.
- Review the 6-7 affected treatment works and share a summary of identified future failure points and the resilience measures planned for each.
- Collaborate with the responsible power company to undertake root cause analysis and develop mutual resilience plans to mitigate and address future outages.
- Provide a plain-English explainer showing how treatment, pumping, storage and pressure interact and why a 4-5 hour power issue can lead to significant customer impacts.
- Send affected customers a clear follow-up explaining the cause, effect, apology, learning and future prevention plan from the May incident.
- Consider wider reassurance communications for nearby or non-affected customers during significant incidents, explaining what happened, who was affected and why the risk is contained.
- Publish targets, timelines and progress updates for the battery back-up programme, including how long batteries can support sites and how they are recharged.
- Assess whether renewable back-up power, including solar and battery storage, could be installed at the affected sites and explain where this is viable.
- Make customer-facing forecasting information more visible, including how heat, weekends, bank holidays, school holidays and demand trends are factored into readiness planning
- Review the incident support model for affected areas, including bottled water/freshwater provision, to ensure support is proportionate to the scale and duration of disruption.

Short-term resilience, restrictions and summer readiness

- Publish a short-term summer resilience plan for Kent and Sussex covering treatment, pumping, storage, re-routing, leakage response and emergency readiness for the rest of this summer and future heatwaves
- Create a public progress tracker for the affected-area investment programme, showing milestones for new treatment capacity, storage, pipelines and completion dates through to 2030.
- Set out what is being prioritised immediately to increase resilience and explicitly confirm whether any work is being deprioritised or delayed to deliver those actions.
- Educate customers on when peak demand occurs, how temperature affects demand and what types of water use are most helpful to reduce during hot weather.
- Explore whether incentives could encourage customers to reduce discretionary water use during high-demand periods, recognising that peak demand may occur across days/weeks rather than hours.
- Develop or promote discounts, subsidies or bill-repayment options for water-saving products such as water butts and other water-efficiency tools.
- Provide comparative data showing the impact of household, business and restriction-related demand reductions in customer-friendly terms.
- Continue and publicise partnerships with business customers to reduce demand during supply stress, including examples of what worked and the impact achieved.
- Introduce or promote incentives and easier reporting routes for customers to report visible leaks quickly, alongside feedback showing what happened after a report.
- Work with developers and relevant planning stakeholders to require or encourage rainwater storage, water efficiency and lower supply impact in new developments.
- Provide an update on the Compulsory Meter programme from 2018 to help those who have not been metered this way understand why and what the future plans are.

Local updates, clear restrictions messaging and customer confidence

- Provide postcode, local-area or road-level incident updates before, during and after supply issues, including the issue status, likely impact, next update time and what customers should do.
- Keep customers in the loop from initial investigation through resolution and mitigation, using SMS/email/app updates with links to fuller information where needed.
- Use concise incident and restrictions messages that explain the key point quickly, with hyperlinks or clear signposting to detailed information for customers who want more.
- Publish and maintain clear hosepipe restriction guidance across digital, broadcast and print channels, including what is allowed, what is not allowed and why restrictions are needed.
- Strengthen non-digital communications through printed materials, local media, community venues and direct outreach so customers who do not use social media or email still receive restriction and incident information.
- Publish regular updates showing the positive impact of customer action, including changes in demand, storage recovery and reduced risk of low pressure or interruptions.
- Translate demand management and water-saving impacts into simple customer-friendly comparisons, so people can understand how individual and collective actions help.
- Explain what operational changes are being made to reduce the length of outages and how these changes will improve restoration times in future incidents.
- Use community engagement, school outreach and local forums to explain hot-weather demand, water efficiency, restrictions and how customers can help reduce risk.
- Run customer focus groups or equivalent research to understand preferred communication channels, level of detail and needs of digitally excluded or vulnerable customers.
- Increase registration for AquAlerter, app, email and SMS alerts at every customer contact point and explain the benefits of adding a mobile number for incident updates.

Session transcript

Attendance list

David Hinton	Chief Executive Officer of South East Water
Oliver Martin	Strategy and Regulation Director at South East Water
Nicky Taylor	Managing Director of Taylor McKenzie Research (TMCK) – Lead facilitator
Alison Austin	Non-Exec Director and Board Member for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
12x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under South East Water

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining us. My name is Alison and I'm chairing today's discussion. I should say that I'm a recently appointed Non-Executive Director for CCW. Now, tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme and the purpose of Water Voice is simple but important; it's to give our customers a stronger and much more direct voice in how their water company performs, communicates and improves. So, this is an ad hoc Accountability Session with South East Water, which has been arranged in response to the supply issues that were experienced by customers in Kent towards the end of May of this year, which was, we know, was a period of extreme heat.

Now, we know that some customers experienced changes with their water supply and this evening is really all about understanding what happened, what should have happened and what will change as a result. So, this session is about accountability and it's very much an opportunity for customers to question senior leaders from South East Water directly about the issue, which is why we have Oliver [Martin] and David [Hinton] from South East Water; to question them directly about the issue and to ask where improvement is needed and to commit to practical actions that will be taken forward.

Can I just say that it's not a complaints hearing and neither is it a technical inquiry; it's very much a structured, customer-led conversation focused on accountability, learning and agreeing clear and above all, practical actions going forward. The topics we intend to cover this evening have been shaped by these customers this evening who are present, through the pre-task and briefing discussion and that's really important because this is the agenda of the community of customers that we've got here this evening. It's built around everyone's lived experiences and the questions that they want to ask you from South East Water to answer.

So, we're all expecting this to be constructive but probably a challenging discussion and I hope that customers can feel they're able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and expectations. Equally, we expect clear and very transparent responses from South East Water, from Oliver and David yourself; plain English, no acronyms. And I'll put my flag here, I've worked in many sectors but the water industry has the worst record, as far as I'm concerned, for using acronyms and expecting everyone to know about them, so be aware that I will stamp and jump in on any acronym. I'm new to the CCW board, so there will be things that I don't understand that maybe even your customers do, so don't be worried about that, I will simply ask.

Just to say that this session is being fully transcribed and it will be published along with a list of the proposed actions within seven [working] days. We would ask you, South East Water, to also publish an Action Plan responding to the commitments made this evening and this transparency is a really key part of what makes this whole accountability process meaningful. We've got a lot of people online tonight, so in terms of ground rules, we will try and take one person at a time to speak, we'll try and be focused on our contributions and above all, I think we need to concentrate on forward-looking actions. So, what will change, by when, who's going to be responsible and from my point of view, how will customers know that there has been a change and how will they know to measure any progress?

Just another little rule, because we're online, if you could keep yourself on mute when you're not speaking, there's a lovely raise your hand function under the actions if you want to come in and we'll try and bring you in at the appropriate point. But please, also use the chat if you want to add a short point or flag a technical issue.

Session transcript

I'd like to briefly introduce those joining us this evening and first of all just to introduce Nicky Taylor from Taylor McKenzie Research who is our independent lead facilitator. Now, he is going to guide the discussion and ensure all voices are heard. He's very experienced in these, whereas this is my first one, so I'm very happy, Nicky, to be given guidance by yourself. And representing South East Water just to confirm, we have David Hinton who's the Chief Executive of South East Water and Oliver Martin, Director for Strategy and Regulations.

What I'd like to just confirm is we have three questions, which will be asked the first question by Community Member 3. Question 2 will be asked by Community Member 9 and Question 3 will be asked by Community Member 7. But the first thing really to do is to go round our community members to get us started, so we'll go round the room. Each of you are in a different order, so I would really just like you to take your time, introduce yourself with just your first name and where you're from. Can I ask one of you to kick off, please?

Community Member 1: I'm Community Member 1, I'm from Eastbourne, right down in the South East. So, we have a lot of problems when the summer comes.

Community Member 2: I'm Community Member 2, Cookham Dean in Berkshire. Fortunately, I haven't had any problems but obviously concerned about others that have.

Community Member 3: Community Member 3, from Bearsted in Kent and we're currently going under a hosepipe ban at the moment.

Community Member 4: Hello, I'm Community Member 4, I'm from Hailsham, East Sussex, and I'm expecting a hosepipe ban very soon.

Community Member 5: Hi everybody, I'm Community Member 5, I'm from Staplefield in Haywards Heath and yeah, we've currently got a hosepipe ban.

Community Member 6: Hi, I'm Community Member 6, from Maidstone. I've got the hosepipe ban and I'm very interested to hear today's discussion.

Community Member 7: Hi, my name is Community Member 7, I live in Whitstable, Kent, and I've got issues with low pressure, thank you.

Community Member 8: Hi, my name's Community Member 8, I live in Hailsham, East Sussex.

Community Member 9: Hi, Community Member 9 from Sevenoaks in Kent.

Community Member 10: Hi, I'm Community Member 10, I'm from Farnborough in Hampshire.

Community Member 11: Hi, I'm Community Member 11, I live in Sevenoaks and we're under a hosepipe ban.

Community Member 12: I'm Community Member 12, finance manager, I'm in Surrey and London.

CCW Chair: Thank you, that's really helpful. So, we've got names and we've got some idea of locations for Oliver and David. My thanks again for giving up your evening; it's a much cooler evening than when we did our pre-task last week when we were all sweltering. I'm going to now hand over to Nicky to begin the discussion.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: Fantastic Alison, thank you so much and thank you everyone for attending. This evening, we are joined by two representatives from South East Water, they're going to remain for the three questions, which is great, it means I don't have to sub people in and out of the room. I think it would be good just to hear very quickly an introduction from the two of them and then we can take it from there. Oliver, do you want to start us off?

Oliver Martin: Evening everyone, so my name is Oliver Martin, I'm the Strategy and Regulation Director at South East Water, so that means I look after water resource planning, environment water quality and regulation. So, all of our long-term plans and also liaising with all of our regulators as well. I'll pass over to David.

David Hinton: Evening all, so I'm David Hinton, CEO, I've been with South East Water for about 25 years. I used to do Ollie's job actually, amongst others, so I've worked in a number of areas of the water industry over the last 25 years.

TMcK Facilitator: Fantastic, thank you both very much indeed. I've got a little bit more housekeeping to cover off before we get started. I want to just explain a little bit about how the transcript will be handled. In the room this evening we are obviously just trying to refer to people by their first name. In the published transcript, all customer names will of course be redacted. After the session you will have the opportunity to review the transcript before it's published and if there's anything you've said that you'd prefer to be removed or further anonymised, you can of course request that and it will be respected. The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect the discussion and the actions agreed, not to single out individuals.

Each question will have the exact same structure: we have a customer who will ask the question, as explained by Alison, South East Water will then have between five and seven minutes to respond to that question. The community members are expected to listen intently as that question is being answered and we'll have an in-depth discussion as a sort of group to go over what we've heard and react to the response. We will then work together to define the actions that we want to see form part of South East Water's action plan.

We are going to be creating a live document of the actions and outcomes and that will be formulated both by what we hear from David and Oliver in the response, but also from actions as customers you want to see become part of that action plan. I will share that on my screen, so we can see it happen as it's being discussed.

Once we have agreed the actions, as a community, South East Water, so David and Oliver, will have a short opportunity to respond to any of the actions that they see that are maybe out of scope or not particularly feasible for the company and if constraints are raised, these will be discussed and recorded transparently.

We are obviously in the midst of doing a number of Accountability Sessions and South East Water have committed to a number of actions so far, which can be made available and have been made available on our action plan progress tracker. Our job after this session will just be to cross reference those actions and make sure that we're just not repeating the same ones and if there are any that could perhaps have picked up or been repeated, we will bring that out in the report that we produce.

This webinar has been made available for live viewing, to members of the CCW team, DEFRA, Ofwat, South East Water company members and any relevant Water Voice, CCW observers and community members of the CCW Water Voice Panel. The observers are listening only and will not take part in the discussion. That is the end of my housekeeping, so I would like now to hand back over to Alison, who is going to get things going.

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I'd like to kick things off now with the first question, which is going to be asked by Community Member 3.

Community Member 3: Good evening, everyone. Right, so the questions are, customers want to understand whether the May supply issues and the current Kent wide hosepipe restrictions are symptoms of the same underlying weakness in the network. South East Water has now said raw water levels are still in a good position, but that the challenge is treating, pumping and refilling drinking water storage tanks quickly enough during high demand. What exactly caused the May incident, what is under pressure now and when did South East Water first know that treatment, pumping, storage pressure, or local supply capacity could become a risk? Which communities remain most exposed during the current heatwave and what has been learned from this incident compared with previous outages?

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Community Member 3. The first two paragraphs really set the scene for the whole evening and I would very much like David and Oliver to focus in on the last paragraph. In responding, it would be really helpful if you could be as specific as possible, if you could set out what happened briefly, if you could say what was already in place, what was done during the incidents and what will change as a result of this evening and this discussion and a timeframe. And as I keep going back to, how do customers, how do we see, how do we measure progress and the change?

David Hinton: Sure, so what happened, so this is quite a long answer and I suspect as we go through the rest of the evening, I will expand on it, so I don't want to do a 15-minute monologue, so I will try and keep it to the allocated time. In the May then, so there's two things going on here, is when we manage water resources, we manage both how much raw water we've got, so how much storage we've got. So, you've all seen pictures of reservoirs, they are really low, on the news and that's the raw water. Then the second thing is the production capacity and that is our ability to treat the water, pump it, send it to your taps, meeting the demand that's occurring at the time.

We don't store a lot of treated water, we make it fresh and that's because you can't keep stored drinking water for very long, we need to keep it fresh. For the May then, what we were seeing was really high demands in certain areas of our network that was outstripping, if you like, our manufacturing ability. So, our ability to take the raw water, treat it and pump it to customers. We saw that over the period, because demand got very high; it got, it was well over 120-130 million litres higher than it normally is and that meant our production capacity in some of the areas affected, not the whole of Kent, my memory is not the whole of the company, but in some areas that demand outstripped our ability to supply and therefore the supply was impacted.

That's fundamentally what happened. There was a number of mitigating factors. We lost power to quite a lot of Eastern Kent on Saturday, I don't know if you remember how the week went, but Saturday was the first really hot day?

CCW Chair: I'm sorry David, could I just ask, you lost power, where did you lose power, I missed that?

1. Question amendment. The following question was displayed to participants: "Customers want to understand what caused the May supply issues, what South East Water has learned from them and whether those lessons have already changed how the company prepared for the latest June heatwave. South East Water has said raw water levels remain in a good position, but that the challenge during very high demand is treating, pumping and refilling drinking water storage tanks quickly enough. What exactly caused the May incident and when did South East Water first know that treatment, pumping, storage, pressure or local supply capacity could become a risk? What has been learnt from the May incident and what did South East Water do differently to prepare for the June heatwave and reduce the risk of further supply interruptions?"

Session transcript

David Hinton: In Eastern Kent and North Eastern Kent; it wasn't just us, it was the area, it had a power cut and a power blip for a period. It affected us and our neighbour, Southern Water. So, we went into the period – obviously predicting hot weather, we saw that at least six days or seven days before – with all of our treating water storage pretty much full up. So, we went into the period above 80% in our treated water storage and the power cut made some areas, particularly Eastern Kent, drop down to 20-30% because we were no longer pumping the water because the power wasn't there pumping the treating, but the demand was still high. That contributed to it, it wasn't the entire story, but that certainly contributed to it.

CCW Chair: How long were you without power, how long were you not able to pump?

David Hinton: It varied, we've got 88 treatment works, it affected – and that's across our whole area, so we've got a lot of treatment works – it affected about six or seven and for about four or five hours. It varied between each one. But we basically lost manufacturing capability and we only roughly have about 24-hour storage in the networks. When you lose half a day, a quarter of a day, that could quite quickly take...

CCW Chair: Well, four to five hours is a smaller proportion than you're saying for the whole day.

David Hinton: Yeah, it varied, I mean some sites were seven or eight hours, some sites were three hours, but nevertheless, we lost production capability, which made the storage reservoirs drop down. I could go into it in a lot more detail, but that's fundamentally really, really high demand on a period when we did lose our manufacturing capability.

CCW Chair: You've explained in just over four or five minutes what happened, but could you talk about what you have done, what you did during the incidents and what have you changed? I mean if there were only – so you said there were six to seven pumping stations affected for four to five hours, were these pumping stations that were expected to have problems?

David Hinton: No, I mean we do suffer as a company from power issues, we are on the end of the power network and quite often there are small – it's not a very long power cut, it's enough to turn our treatment works off that requires restarting. And because our treatment works are quite complex, they don't just start, it's not like turning on an electricity power station, they've got chemical processes, biological processes and they take a while to start, so it's not...

CCW Chair: So, do you have a business incident and a business continuity plan for rectifying power cuts and do you not have an ability of protocols? I mean surely we've all learned from Heathrow last year about power cuts, etc?

David Hinton: Yeah, so we have a, we've got a number of strategies: we've got batteries at some sites, so we don't have to rely on the power. We've got generators at other sites, but some of the generators in themselves don't solve this issue of having a small power cut. You can run the site on the generator, but if the site needs restarting, it will take a while to restart. Talking about the future piece, is we've got a number of sites that we're intending to put on battery, we've already ordered all the batteries. It's quite innovative, we don't think there's any other treatment works in the country being run on battery power, to ensure that we can effectively...

CCW Chair: So, you do have business continuity plans, but in a sense, have you learned from that May incident in terms of doing things differently for this June heatwave to further reduce the risk of supply interruptions?

Session transcript

David Hinton: In the June heatwave, two things happened: one is we didn't have as many power issues directly from the National Grid power supply and we also put even more generators out than we normally do. So, running the sites on generators effectively the whole time, which isn't the most green-friendly option because it's diesel, but we were effectively running our treatment works, a number of our treatment works, on a diesel generator all the way through the hot period, so that we weren't susceptible. That's one of the key learnings between May and June.

CCW Chair: Sorry, from May? Are we talking about May?

David Hinton: Yeah, from May to June. I was comparing the May event to the June event. So we had fewer electrical issues in June, but we did put even more sites on generators for the June event, as a learning from the May event.

CCW Chair: So, what will customers see as a result of your learnings and changes in your business continuity plans?

David Hinton: We are going to get increasingly more resilient to power issues. The battery programme, as I've mentioned, is being rolled out across the business. It's a battery programme we started 18 months ago and it doesn't affect the whole area, the east part of Kent is particularly susceptible to this issue.

And on the other issue I haven't really talked about, is the increasingly high demand. The period in May we saw a real peak in our demand, but we saw a real peak in localised demand. It was half-term and so we had an impact particularly in Whitstable, as a lot of people were holidaying in Whitstable at the time.

CCW Chair: Thank you for that. I think we've run out of time on that particular issue. What I'd like to do next is go back to take a pause, take a breather and I'd like to go back to our community here this evening, in terms of their reaction. So, Nicky, can I had back to you, please?

TMcK Facilitator: Absolutely, thank you very much, Alison, and David for the response there. I did ask you all to listen quite intently to what you've heard as a response, so I think the fairest thing to do now is just to open up to the room. Does anyone want to get us started? Community Member 4, you're right in there with your hand up, so let me hear what you've got to say?

Community Member 4: Yeah, I'm wondering obviously if this is an ongoing issue with the power situation, is there no way they can have solar panels to, obviously if it's hot, the sun should be out, to charge up batteries or wind or something as a back-up to these issues that have been occurring?

TMcK Facilitator: So, you're thinking there is a green alternative to potentially just using generators?

Community Member 4: Hmmm.

TMcK Facilitator: And I guess the action there would be when it comes to the battery plan, is that using solar and other renewable sources? Community Member 12, do you want to jump in?

Session transcript

Community Member 12: I think Community Member 4 covered it quite good in terms of the back-up power system with it being battery, they did mention they did have battery back-up, but I mean, what are the sizes of these batteries and how long can they be used for, can they be maximised? What's the recharging process for these batteries; when they go flat, what happens?

TMcK Facilitator: Anyone else got any thoughts on what they've heard? Community Member 11, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 11: Yes, out of interest, the six or seven sites that went down due to problems, have those been focused on to correct? Also, when describing a battery, is it a battery back-up system? Because obviously they must not be running on batteries all the time, so is it a battery back-up for how long? Is that a day, half a day, 10 hours?

TMcK Facilitator: I think we're wanting a real lot of information around what sort of resilience is being built in for the power, so we've got lots of question about the batteries and how they work and when they kick in and all the rest of it. Why is that important to you, Community Member 11? What is it about that, that you feel, why do you need to know that information from a customer's perspective?

Community Member 11: Well, David has brought it up, it would be very interesting to understand in a little more detail, because I thought that's part of the session?

He's mentioned specifically six or seven sites, has that been rectified? Because obviously they were the ones that couldn't continue to operate during that period and just a little bit of clarity would be of interest.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 12, you've got your hand back up, do you want to jump back in there?

Community Member 12: That was a legacy hand, sorry, I'll turn it off.

TMcK Facilitator: I guess my question to the room, did the explanation you just listened to, does it give you a clear enough picture of what actually happened, do you feel that it's all been dealt with, are we happy with the response? Has anyone got any questions around it?

Community Member 9: I mean I got a letter, which was a great letter explaining from South East Water, dated the 18th of June. For a start, I'd like to say that this is quite a robust piece of explanation that they sent out, which I think was...

CCW Chair: Community Member 9, you're very quiet, would you mind speaking up a bit, please?

Community Member 9: I'm just saying that I got a letter from South East Water explaining what had happened on the 18th of June, which I thought was a very good communication and something that we'd been calling about. It's really saying exactly what David said on his piece. So, I think we must applaud they've done that and they've listened to some previous moaning from our side. So that's nice that they've reacted to something we've said previously.

I think on the May thing, I think it is disappointing that there was no mitigating – they weren't really planning as well as they should have done before that and I think that's what we've historically had from these guys, is that they've never put in robust plans ahead and it's the first time we've heard about that in June that they actually put some robust, really good planning in, to try to stop problems.

Session transcript

So, I think that's the first time we've actually experienced that as a group. Because May, they fell short and I thought the May incident was very concerning indeed. So, the fact that they've put these generators in ... I'm not too worried that they're all diesel, I think the most important thing is that there is a plan to migrate everything across to solar, electrical, etc. That's not going to be done overnight, but we want the fix straightaway, don't we? We want to make sure that our supply is not affected.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 1, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 1: I just wondered, you said eight or nine power plants went down. How many are there that they're responsible for?

TMcK Facilitator: I think it's the water pumping stations, I believe there's about 48 from memory and I think it was 88%.

David Hinton: I mean 88 across the whole company area, 8 is quite a lot of the area in Kent. Nicky, do you want me to pick up on any of those points, just because I know people are dying for a bit more information on some bits?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, absolutely David, we're going to discuss all the different points that you've raised and then we'll come back to you and you'll have loads of time.

David Hinton: You know what I'm like, I'm itching...

CCW Chair: I know, just hang on in there, make some notes so that they can be focused and in order.

David Hinton: I'm doing that, Alison.

CCW Chair: Great.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay folks. I mean as customers, this is your opportunity to challenge and we've heard from David exactly what caused the outage in May and it had obviously quite major effects on some of you directly and many of you indirectly. We mentioned in the briefing session, we spoke a lot around the monitoring and escalation, when did you first find out about all of this going on, how did they react to it, is there anything there that you think they should have done better or that you maybe want to hear about from David tonight?

Community Member 9: Yeah, clearly things were happening real time. On the letter it says they had lots of tankers on standby, but why couldn't they get more tankers to take the water to the affected sites? Why couldn't they have more on standby and stuff like that? So, I think as it was developing, I think the reaction was – I'm just concerned that the reaction wasn't as strong enough as it could have been and why is that? It seems like they were rabbits in the headlamps with regards to – do you make a plea to the public to stop using so much water in that area or whatever? I mean there must be levers they can pull if they can see things happening, so why weren't they deployed?

TMcK Facilitator: It's about understanding what lessons have been learned going forward and what can be done to improve response? Community Member 4, do you want to come in?

Session transcript

Community Member 4: Yeah, I was just going to say, over in East Sussex we haven't got any communication letter. I mean I know it wasn't our area, but it would be nice for us to, as customers to have communication as well so that we feel a bit more reassured that it won't happen again, even on our side. So yeah, I think it's just the communication again is lacking, if we aren't in the immediate area.

TMcK Facilitator: If you're sat in David and Oliver's shoes, what would you be expecting as a customer to help you understand what had happened?

Community Member 4: I think maybe just an email, just explaining what happened, just apologising and just going through the points. I mean obviously this is the first time I've heard the reasonings behind it and obviously it makes a lot more sense when you hear as a customer what happened and what they will be doing to stop it. You feel a bit more reassured. So, I think it just needs to be on a quick email, just very simply, and for all customers, not just those in the area.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to come to Community Member 12, in a second, but before I do Community Member 9, you're were in the middle of delivering some sort of focused actions before you had to jump next door and I think you were talking about how a lot of the fixes that are in place are future-focused, but you wanted to know really what's happening now to help, to make sure that over the course of the summer, we don't have a repeat of May?

Community Member 9: I think that's an important point, I mean they're talking about another heatwave next week, so what are the resources that they're putting in place for a potential issue next week? You may as well just have them on standby the whole way through the summer. And I think the other question I've got is, I know it sounds really stupid, but with all the things that they're doing, the raw water is still there, so is there a problem for a water shortage during the summer, are they predicting that or not; can they envisage that, or are we getting sufficient rainfall to offset that? They must have predictions of where we are because we're into July now. If we had a drought in July and August, will we have really bad problems? I don't know, but I mean what are their predictions now for the coming months?

TMcK Facilitator: So, Community Member 9, I think what you're saying there is, we're almost looking for a visibility of some form of forecasting, which will allow you as customers to understand are there going to be shortages as a result of operational issues and historic lack of investment, which are causing these issues, or is it going to be due to the fact there isn't just enough raw water there due to drought or similar, is that roughly what...?

Community Member 9: Yeah, I think there's two issues here, really. There's the pumping of the clean water and treating it because the infrastructure hasn't been put in properly. And then there's the storage thing as well, there's not enough water in the whole system, it hasn't come from the aquifers and things like that, then there is a deeper problem, really.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 12, you've got your hand up, thank you for waiting.

Community Member 12: That's okay, it's more about the feedback on the priority register. I think we all felt that there was a very good response to those on the register, but how are they going to support all customers and not just those on the register? What are they lessons learned from that incident?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, I think we spoke in the briefing session that after even a few hours without water we all feel quite vulnerable and I think a few of you had mentioned that.

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We've now had quite a good chance to discuss some of the actions, so we've got a few showing on my live document and what I'd like to do, I'm just going to read them out and then we can look to add to them. So again, please pay attention when I'm reading these out and let me know if they reflect what we've heard both from David but also from what we've heard from customers as they have been speaking. So let me just share my screen here.

Here we can see on our table, we can see you've got what the question was and then we can look at what has happened and then what's going to be done in the future, so obviously it's put there that there's a plan to grow increasingly resilient to power issues including battery a battery rollout programme.

We've got some of the actions written down that I'm going to read out:

[A] This is from a customer, so can we start looking at what renewable sources there are to provide back-up power? So, I think it's really just about more information, I know David's desperate to jump in and tell us a little bit about that. I think as customers it's clearly important to you to understand what these battery systems look like and how they operate.

[B] Have the affected sites been analysed to identify potential future failure points and what are the resilience plans for it? You know is there a weakness there that over the summer it's going to be met?

Alison, do you want to jump in quickly before I continue?

CCW Chair: Just to say that, in the "We did" column, which is a very good summary, under the 6 or 7 treatment works affected in Eastern Kent, I think David said that it was for a varying period of hours, for only 4 to 5 hours, so for me if that is true, then I'm intrigued as to why a short period of power outage had such an enormous consequential set of consequences? I think that's something that I would certainly as a member of CCW like to know more about and maybe that's an action to explore quite why that has such a major implication? Maybe then I need to understand more about manufacturing capacity, but you did talk about 24-hour storage so...?

TMCK Facilitator: I think we can get that added in just under [F], I'm sure Emma and Ryan will be working on that as I speak.

CCW Chair: Thank you.

TMCK Facilitator: I didn't introduce Emma and Ryan, they're my secret helpers in the background who are pulling together all the analysis live for us, so there you go, you can see them typing on my screen by magic there.

[C] We wanted to see more appropriate reaction to the scale of the issues, so provision of fresh water to affected areas has perhaps felt inadequate.

[D] Clarify what the recharging process of the batteries is like and how long the battery pack can last. Again, more information around the batteries.

[E] Ensure communication regarding incidents is provided to all customers, even the ones not directly affected, to help reassure customers. This could be via email, explaining why the issue occurred. I think to just point out there the point that was made by Community Member 9, the letter that was sent out was very reassuring to those that did receive it.

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[F] Could we look to make forecasting information more available to customers, so what are we risking here into the future, is it the ability to manufacture and pump the water or is it more to do with the raw water available at the time? I think that would help put people's minds at ease and potentially help people understand why they're being asked to have a hosepipe ban.

[G] Providing customers with a better understanding of how what seems to be a relatively short outage can result in such significant impacts, to Alison's point there.

So, these are the actions we will work on as things develop, but I just want to go back to the customers and to Alison and see now that you've read these, have we covered everything that we want to, is there anything else that we need to add here? Community Member 11, do you want to jump in there?

Community Member 11: Out of interest, would it be possible for South East Water to share their targets and then also share updates whether they're actually achieving their targets for customers?

TMcK Facilitator: What specific targets have you got in mind?

Community Member 11: Well, they're talking about batteries, they're talking about generators, to actually say, "Right, these are the 10, 15, 20 sites, the timeframe is going to be X," and then show us as customers how they're successfully completing that or delays to that, to try and reassure us that the plans they are saying, which will help in the future, are being met.

TMcK Facilitator: I think just generally, listening to the responses, I think there is an action which needs to be put in potentially around what are all the short-term fixes that are in place? What are the learnings, what have you done about it and why is this important that these steps have been put in place to mitigate against issues going forward? I think there was a bit of a need for that, so potentially – they've got an action going in there just now, so that's great. Alison, do you want to jump in quickly before we head back?

CCW Chair: A very quick one, David, you mentioned that Eastern Kent suffers from power outages: have you done a root cause analysis with your UK Power Network, grid, power grid companies to work out what are they doing to invest in your part of the grid to reduce this happening going forward? Because that's something you can apply pressure elsewhere. And also, what are their business continuity plans in terms of supporting the water sector as a vital utility in terms of redirecting power as quickly as possible and supplying their diesel generators to supply your systems with power as well?

TMcK Facilitator: Alison, we're right on time to hand over to David, he's going to have a few minutes to respond to these now. We do need to be quite strict to the timings of things, so you've got about four minutes to respond. So, Alison, if you want to take over?

CCW Chair: Okay, so just very quickly David and Oliver, if you would like to respond to this, it's really about highlighting anything that we've missed that you are already committed to doing that you haven't mentioned? And if there is anything that is not feasible and explaining clearly why?

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David Hinton: There's quite a lot to unpack here and I've only got a few minutes. So, one thing I would say is, I talked about the power, but obviously it's power in conjunction with extremely high demand. So, the other part of the mitigation is related to demand reduction and we've got plans for that going forward in terms of water efficiency and other tools we have. I'm going to quickly pick some of these off.

So, the battery is, the site runs off the battery all the time, but the battery is connected to the mains all the time. It's like my mum's chair lift, which I always think of; her chair lift is constantly connected to the mains. It means that if the mains goes off, the chair still works, but the battery then immediately gets charged when it gets connected to the mains again. So, it is off the battery the whole time, but the mains is connected to it the whole time.

Yes, we've looked at solar, we've got a number of solar plants in place, but not in the locations that these plants are at. It is an interesting one to think about talking to non-affected customers about the issues that other customers have been affected by, definitely one to take away and consider. I thought that was an interesting suggestion. We do forecast obviously a lot, we are weather obsessed, water companies are weather obsessed and we have models that link the Met Office forecast to expected demand, including considerations like half-term, school holidays other than half-term, weekends, weekdays, all that kind of stuff.

So, we do forecast demand, but we do see demand above what we forecast in this particular instance and there was a number of factors going on. There's lots that contributes to water demand forecasting. We certainly show on our website and at other places, the water that's been used day-by-day and we also say what we'd like it to be. So, we do that largely by social media and email and on the website, we obviously push that out there. So that forecasting is an interesting piece. Clearly communicating with customers on the cause, effect learnings and future plans. So, we've got a lot of future plans. We are seeing climate change accelerate way faster than anyone anticipated, including the government and we use the UK Government Climate Change Forecast to design our water resources position.

We can only take so much from the environment. We haven't got a carte blanche to take as much from the environment as we need; it's all licenced and in Kent we were pretty much running to licence. So, there's a dialogue to be held with the Environment Agency and others about how much we can licence and how much we can take from the environment, that's another discussion. We are not free to take as much from rivers or from wells or groundwater as we want, it's all under a licence condition. So that is another consideration for this climate change, but we've got a lot of plans, including those discussions with the Environment Agency.

CCW Chair: Can I just stop you, David. Climate change is accepted by everybody, all the water companies know about it, we all know it's happening faster. I think we're talking about the May incident that has influenced what you're trying to do for this June last week we've had and we've got another one coming next week that we're being warned about and everyone is saying, "It's amazing that we're all having this and we haven't even got really into July, let alone August." So, things are accelerating. My question to you is, are you accelerating your resilience plans?

David Hinton: Yeah, so we are making sure we can cope as well as we can with that climate change. And that is making sure that things like, so the power impact lost us a number of hours, and supply and demand was very tight anyway, so the balance between how much customers were using and how much we could supply was tight, so it doesn't take a lot of time for that, effectively, our supply to be less than the demand.

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CCW Chair: David, that's a small technical issue, but I'm asking a slightly bigger picture question here, which is are you accelerating your climate change resilience and mitigation plans?

I think it would be very useful if you have something – do you have a report on your website that is consumer-friendly, which actually lays out what you were going to do and how you're now going to accelerate that?

David Hinton: We have a – I wouldn't say we've got a single report that does that job, but we've got a number of plans that are in the public domain about what we are doing in terms of resilience.

CCW Chair: Yeah, those plans tend to be very much aimed at Ofwat, they tend to be aimed at regulators, I'm talking about something that's suitable for consumers, which doesn't necessarily dumb things down. You just have to look at the airtime that the Climate Change Committee, the Adaptation Committee, the Mitigation Committee have all had over the last 10 days. I think it would be appropriate for South East Water to consider what they might be able to do in this space?

David Hinton: Ollie might be able to help me here, but we've got public versions, I think, of all those long-term plans, which talk about what we're doing. In terms of accelerating new water, that is a more complex area than you might imagine. New assets take a while, take a long time to build...

CCW Chair: It's a broader issue than just bringing on new assets like the Broad Oak reservoir, it's quite a wide spectrum of activity. Maybe that's something we can come back to later or take offline, but that's something that I'm particularly interested in because we're going to have more ... We've got another week next week and we're not even into the middle of July and the school holidays. So, can I just pause there and ask our community here of our customers: is this explanation reasonable, is this proportionate, is there anything that's missed that you would like to comment upon? I'd like to hand back to Nicky, to handle this last section.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks very much, Alison. Yeah, really quickly, folks, in terms of timings, is there anything that's jumping out at you that you've heard that maybe doesn't quite answer what you're wanting it to or are we okay with what we've achieved after that first question? Community Member 12, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 12: Yeah, sorry, I didn't really understand the explanation around the chair and the battery and it's always connected. Can he just clarify what that means, always being connected, the chair explanation?

David Hinton: I was using my mum's stair lift, right?

Community Member 12: Yeah, I haven't got a stair lift, I don't know how they work.

David Hinton: I was describing the way that the stair lift runs off a battery, but as soon as you park the stair lift, it connects to the mains and is constantly charged. So, it's the same thing, the treatment works runs off a battery, the battery is constantly connected to the mains, but when the mains goes off, the battery has obviously got a load of charge.

Community Member 12: So, what's the capacity of the battery then when it's off charge?

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David Hinton: We don't really have to worry about that, Community Member 12, the power cuts are short enough. It's a very short power cut that typically causes our plant to turn off, it's more of a blip, so the battery just stops the blip happening and therefore the treatment works doesn't turn off and we don't have to restart it. So, it was a bad analogy, but I was just thinking about my mum's stair lift.

Community Member 12: I'm sorry she's got one, but that makes sense.

TMcK Facilitator: Anything else before we move on to Question 2 from anyone? Community Member 11?

Community Member 11: Is South East Water starting to look into desalination plants, considering there is a limit to the amount of fresh water available, especially with reservoirs, the time it takes to build, is that under consideration?

David Hinton: Yes, Community Member 11, so we've got a number of different options that we bring online, Alison mentioned Broad Oak, which is a reservoir, a surface reservoir, one you can boat on, one of those open ones. And then after that we move into desalination. Ollie, do you know the years? 2040? 2045?

Oliver Martin: Yeah, it is, yeah.

David Hinton: 2040-2045, somewhere around then, desalination comes online and then we have other options that are all pretty similar. Most of the South East of the UK is looking for that as the next big option after the reservoirs we're all building, because we've got no more water to take from the environment.

TMcK Facilitator: So, these are obviously long-term things, focused long-term changes to the infrastructure which will hopefully reduce these sorts of incidences. David, I just want to quickly pick up on something you mentioned there, very helpfully to Community Member 12, when you were explaining how the battery works. And obviously it's typically at a surge or a very short outage, which causes the plant to go offline for five or six hours at a time. Is it now the case that there are these batteries in all of the at-risk pumping stations, has that now been put in place so this won't happen again?

David Hinton: We have it working fully in one and we've got ... there's six we consider to be now at high risk; it's only over the last couple of years it's occurred. So we've got them and they're all on order. They're a bit unique, they're a bit bespoke, but they're all on their way. We expect to have them in by September, I think. The last one goes in, in September. So, it's not like a long, long project. But in the meantime, we will run those sites on generator.

CCW Chair: It would be very good if you could provide some factual details afterwards to CCW on that particular point?

David Hinton: Will do.

CCW Chair: Both on the batteries and the generators and particularly for those high priority sites in Eastern Kent which are vulnerable to your UK Power grid failures.

David Hinton: Certainly.

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CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed everybody, that's been really helpful. I think we'll now move on to our next question, which is Question 2, which is going to come from Community Member 9. Community Member 9, if you'd like to introduce and read out your question, I'd be very grateful?

Community Member 9: South East Water says every available treatment works and source is producing treated water at full capacity. Storage tanks were filled as much as possible before the heatwave. Leak teams have been increased and water is being re-routed around the network. It is also now bringing in hosepipe restrictions across Kent because demand is too high. If all of those measures are already happening, why is Kent still at the point where restrictions are needed and what additional short-term resilience actions will South East Water deliver now before long-term infrastructure, such as new pipes, extra storage or Broad Oak reservoir are available to prevent customers experiencing low pressure or no water during the rest of this summer or next?

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed and the last part of that is, as part of this, what's been prioritised immediately to increase resilience and what is being deprioritised or delayed to allow that to happen? When and how will this be made available to customers and CCW so progress can be tracked?

I think David, Oliver, we recognise that a business can only do so much, that there are finite resources, so if things are going to be shifted around within a plan, an operational plan, or a strategy in terms of prioritisation, that obviously means that some things are being deprioritised and it's that sort of thing that we're interested in. So, if I could ask you to respond to this, particularly to those latter parts of this particular slide, in terms of the questions? Again, could you be as specific as possible, set out what is happening, what's already in place, what's changing, some dates for when we will see the changes complete, or starting to happen and then complete? Again, the point that I keep stressing, how do we as customers see the change and how do we measure the progress? I'll hand over to you.

David Hinton: So, the statement that was read, that was exactly what was happening. We were seeing demand above the pretty much the maximum treatment capacity we could see and clearly people are concerned that means there's a chance if that demand happens again, that the same outcome happens again. So, one of the big resilience measures we put in place was, I've already talked about, we can't afford to lose time via power cuts. We've also been working with our approach on communication on water being used in the period. We have effectively a set of messages that escalate as the temperature changes about water for essential use. Because there aren't that many tools in the toolbox when demand and supply are really tight.

If you're introducing new water, which we can do by tankering, but tankering doesn't do as much as you think. Even on hundreds of tankers, the amount of volume we actually produce from treatment works is astronomically higher, it can help with small outages. So tankering is one and demand reduction is really important and just encouraging use. One thing I would say as well, is we are performing much more, if you like, partnership and discussion arrangements with business customers.

One of the particular peaks – and we had some really good cooperation from two business customers in the Whitstable area who were using roughly two million litres a day between them and they reduced their water use in the period and that really helped recovery. They proactively helped us with that again in the June event – so, two million litres is bigger than some of our treatment works, so it's quite a high demand, but working with those customers is another part of our long-term plan and we were doing it already from the May event and we did it again in the June event.

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So, we don't cut them off, we just provide them with tanker water or water from another source on wheels and it's not taking it from that locally stressed area, which in this case was the Whitstable area. So, working with business customers, clear messaging to customers about what they can do to help, particularly in the peak periods. It is the peak periods obviously that we're trying to reduce, it's the peak in demand for the small number of days which effectively depletes our ability to manufacture and store water, that we're trying to get customers' help with.

So, a lot of our actions are around that, but ahead of, as you mentioned, Alison, the infrastructure that we've now been funded to deliver, which is in the order of £200-£300m, a lot of that is in Kent, including some new treatment works, new storage and new pipes. So, we are working with customers as I say and helping us in the resilience piece, whilst we wait for that infrastructure to come in and we effectively catch up with the climate change that we have seen year in, year out.

CCW Chair: Could you talk a little bit more about the new treatment works and the new pipes? You were talking about new infrastructure coming online and clearly that's capital investment, that takes time. Have you started, do you have completion dates?

David Hinton: So, there's a raft of different projects. There's pipelines, which move water from areas where we have surplus to areas where there is a potential deficit. There are small storage reservoirs, so they're not the ones you boat on. Storage reservoirs are like the tank in your loft, they've got a lid on and they've got treated water in and we fill those up overnight and then they largely provide customers with water the following day. We've got six more of those, that was funded in the business plan. Considerably a lot more storage of water which is going to help us in there. And then we've got in the order of 30 million litres of new treatment plant capacity, bearing in mind what we supply as a total, on a normal daily basis, about 550, 30 extra megalitres is quite a chunk.

CCW Chair: So, how many treatment plants?

David Hinton: One treatment plant, one effectively...

CCW Chair: One treatment plant, six new storage capacity units and some new big, bulk movement pipelines. But my question was, have they started and when will they finish?

David Hinton: I mean they're obviously all in various different states. They're all going to be finished by 2030, but they're all different timings. So, the new treatment works I think is 2027-28 and then the pipelines are all different periods. And they're all in the state of start, some of them are in the shovel condition and some are in design, some are a bit later.

We prioritise them based on where the biggest need is and where the customers are most at risk. That is the key prioritisation of our schemes. And then obviously there's the delivery, so these things take ages to build in some cases.

CCW Chair: It's very good and I'm really pleased that you've talked about priorities and de-prioritisation because that's very much what we were trying to get to in this question. It would be great in terms of one of the actions, if you would be able to provide a bit more detail to customers on that, and certainly to CCW, if anything is difficult. Could I go back to your great example of talking to the businesses in Whitstable? Demand management at peak times sounds just like what's happening in the electricity sector in terms of what Octopus have been pioneering. Is this something that you intend to expand?

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David Hinton: Yes, I mean I do think the UK generally, its relationship with water particularly at peak, the whole industry needs to think about that, I think. It's a really important measure. We are water stressed in the South East in particular, but it won't only be the South East soon, it will be the whole of the UK. And I think the measures that we are intending to put in place are going to ... we really want to work with customers on reducing the peak demand. And what I'm a massive fan of, is water butts and garden storage devices.

I've got the world's biggest water butt in my house and capturing rainwater and then using that all round the garden. I use it for washing my bike and my lawn mower. So, it's that working with customers to find that demand reduction solution, so it doesn't really end up with any change in quality of life or hobbies or whatever it is, it's just a different way of thinking about drinking water compared to rainwater harvesting.

CCW Chair: Could I ask if there are any areas being de-prioritised to get you through these peaks in terms of resources such as is leakage being allowed to carry on or is maintenance being paused?

David Hinton: In all honesty, I can't say to you I've de-prioritised anything, because so much of what we do is linked to interruptions and resilience to the network. So, leakage, we've done the opposite of de-prioritisation, we've got twice as many people in Kent as we had about three years ago in terms of leakage. We've increased the resource of our operational teams in those areas as well. Maintenance can't fail because if we have a plant that fails, it's the same impact as the power cut, we lose production capacity and manufacturing capacity and that's therefore more likely to impact customers. So, Ollie, can you think of anything that we've actively de-prioritised?

Oliver Martin: No, there's more investment against all of those key areas to make sure that we can reduce the potential for interruptions. So, there's no areas that are being de-prioritised. What I would say, we've got three regions, we've got our western region, which performs really well and doesn't have these water challenges. We've got our Sussex region and a Kent region, our priority investment areas are Kent and Sussex. So, if you look across our whole region, that's where the biggest investment is going because that's where the biggest need is. Western region isn't de-prioritised but there's more investment going into Kent and Sussex.

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that, I'm going to just pause here and hand back to Nicky, who's going to then manage a discussion with our community here about their responses and thoughts on what you've said. So, thank you for that particular section.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you very much, Alison. Okay folks, it's important we now listen to your reaction to what we've just heard, so who wants to kick us off from a customer perspective from what we've just heard? Okay Community Member 9, on you go?

Community Member 9: So, a few points. First of all, picking up on the last point, the Western area, so it is being under-invested in, so are we going to have a problem in 20 years' time in that area? That's a problem in 20 years' time, but that may be an issue for those guys over there. Things that struck me were, you're working with businesses, but how patient would businesses be if you're reducing ... We weren't told what businesses they were, but if that business is producing things and it's reducing its production just to work with the water board, they're not going to do that long-term, are they? That seems to me like a temporary solution, I may be wrong, I may be right on that, but I wouldn't be too happy if I was a business plant and I kept having to reduce my production because there wasn't enough water knocking around.

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The other thing is, peak, I mean I don't know when the peak is, maybe I don't know, maybe I'm just a layperson, but when are the peak times for water? I don't know. Maybe there are other people like me that don't know when the peak times are and we need to be educated in this area to understand that actually the peak time for electricity is when – it used to be when *Coronation Street* was on and during an advert break when everyone put their kettle on, or something like that.

So, I don't really know when that time is for the water, so maybe educate me as to when that is and try to let me water my garden at 11 o'clock at night rather than at potentially at the peak times or whatever it may be. I do think leaks are still an issue, I've been on the website and there's an absolute huge amount of leaks in the area, so I really dispute leaks. I think the leaks are still a problem and it's something that really needs sorting out.

TMcK Facilitator: Can I just ask everyone to raise your hand if you know for sure when the peak water use times are? Community Member 12, I think you raised your hand and the other person is David, so that tells me we don't know. So, I think Community Member 9, your point was, "Maybe it's just me?" but it sounds looking at the room, not many people know when the peak times are. So, I think that's a really clear action, potentially, to get customers onside, is to educate them around when are the peak times and what can you do to help? I think that's definitely an important point to take away. Community Member 4, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 4: Yeah, linked to that, I was wondering if with power, obviously I'm on Economy 7, so we're incentivised to charge things overnight and that sort of thing. Is there something similar, as we've got water meters, could that be thought of to try and incentivise customers to get a discount if they use out of peak hours, whenever that is? Also, with the water reduction methods in the garden, whenever I look on there to see how much water butts and things like that are on there, they seem quite expensive, I don't see that much of a discount. So maybe there's a way of getting a bigger discount on those to incentivise us again to save water?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 6, you had your hand up next, so I'll come to you?

Community Member 6: Thank you. Just a very quick comment, I was interested in David's remark about the two businesses in Whitstable saving, I think it was 2 million or something.

But for me it would be interesting to get a comparison, like how would that compare to households with the hosepipe ban, just some sort of comparison that I could make sense of; that's what I wanted to remark on.

TMcK Facilitator: Why is that important, Community Member 6? What it is about understanding how businesses are saving versus what customers are being asked to do? Why does that matter to you?

Community Member 6: I think it just helps me as a consumer, a normal person, understand what impact we're having in helping save the water. It's just another way of giving us that data, giving us that comparison to feel more real, feel more common sense in my head.

TMcK Facilitator: It's almost like, "I'm doing this, but there is a reason for it, here is the outcome of my sacrifice of potentially not watering my plants with a hose," is that what you're ...?

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Community Member 6: Yeah, I mean personally, I'm not too fussed about the water, the hosepipe ban, we mentioned it before, last week; we expect it now. And like David, I've got water butts, we do our bit, so for me it's not really worry about it, but it's just nice to know how that compares, getting some more comparative data.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 12, you've got your hand up?

Community Member 12: Yeah, I think Community Member 4, we're reading off the same hymn sheet, it's about what's the incentive to buy a water butt? Can it maybe be reduced when you're purchasing from them? Or if you get one, is there some kind of discount or incentive to say, "Yeah, I've got a water butt, I'm saving water, how can it be incentivised"? They used to get these things you could put in your shower, the timers on the taps, in the starter pack when I moved to a particular area, but maybe a similar scheme like that, like what you put in the toilet that makes it water-wise, all these water savings, whether they could have one for the garden to make it more of a range. Not a shop, but more specific to every one of these lovely people who don't have a garden or people who will have a garden.

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, I think both yourself and Community Member 4, are pointing out you want to help, but actually some of the measures that we're being asked to take are relatively expensive, both in terms of water butts or any other sort of tools that could potentially help there. So, anything that South East Water could do on that front would be really helpful. I'm going to come to Community Member 8, first and then I'm going to come to Community Member 9. So, Community Member 8, do you want to jump in there?

Community Member 8: It was just a quick question around water storage. On the last ad hoc, David said about that building sites can just obviously tap into the water, don't need permission. I think it's in Australia, don't they have underground storage that collects rainfall, so surely you could put it back onto the developers to go, "You're tapping into the water system, you don't need to ask, but you've got to put in underground storage for hosepipes and have a different water system," and put it on them to be a bit greener as well, rather than just tapping in and using fresh, clean water for everything?

TMcK Facilitator: I think that comes to maybe Alison, you can help with that, is that something to do with more external discussions that South East Water could look to build upon with local developers or does that sit with someone else? Is that the sort of thing that sits with South East Water?

CCW Chair: I think it sits with the whole of the water industry to work together to change planning regulations and planning permissions and so on that gets that made. Because at the moment they just have a duty, a mandatory duty to provide connections. And there is a big part to play in influencing changes in what can be built. But it's good that it's raised here and it's good because by you as customers raising this, it gives Oliver and David the mandate to go and talk about it at their trade association and to shake their tree to get more active, to have a go at it. So, my thanks for raising it.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you very much. Now Community Member 9, you had your hand up?

Community Member 9: Just on the water butt saga. So basically, I think 15 or 20 years ago there was a scheme that they did and I think you got a voucher and you were able to get a water butt for cost, basically. So, it was run by the water company, and I can't remember which one it was at the time, but basically you got a voucher and they worked with garden centres and maybe it could work with Amazon now, or something like that, and you got a cheap water butt.

CCW Chair: Good value, not cheap, one that works.

Session transcript

Community Member 9: But just giving someone a voucher, then they can go and find this thing and it's quite a good thing to do. They're still paying for it, but they're paying cost.

Community Member 2: I was going to say, if you'd seen the stuff that South East Water sent out today, which we flashed up earlier, if you link through it actually goes to the water butts and everything else that they're offering at discount prices. So that's all being offered, including other water savers.

TMcK Facilitator: Good to know, Community Member 2. And obviously when you're looking at it, did it feel accessible to you, were there any other barriers that would prevent you from finding out more or perhaps purchasing?

Community Member 2: I can't think of anything else that they're not offering at the moment that should be useful. But there's a good deal on water butts and free tools for checking for leaks and things like that.

TMcK Facilitator: Before I start sharing my screen, I'm conscious that Community Member 10 and Community Member 7, you've maybe not said anything on this particular question. Is there anything just to come to the two of you, is there anything that you want to add before we share screens?

Community Member 10: Nothing from me.

Community Member 7: No, not at all.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 12, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 12: I've had a look, they're only offering £5 off, which doesn't really help, if you ask me.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so when we talk about barriers, it is cost?

Community Member 12: It's still £45. I think what Community Member 9 said, is there something for someone on a lower income? £45, £50 isn't really going to make someone go and do it.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 11, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 11: Yes, on that point about availability, because I've taken advantage of the shower heads that are on offer from South East Water as well as the water tap for saving water, so I did find those very useful, which were provided free of charge.

TMcK Facilitator: Good to know, so it sounds like there is some help out there, which is great to hear. I'm going to share my screen...

David Hinton: Community Member 8 has got his hand up.

TMcK Facilitator: Oh, apologies, thanks for that.

Community Member 8: Yeah, it was just on the water butt issue, the price of that as well, it's obviously great having one but how are you getting the water into the water butt? Surely you need to have guttering, downpipes, which again, not everyone can do themselves? So, it's not just the cost of a water butt that's potentially £100, depending on where you need to get it to and from, if you can get one as well.

Session transcript

Community Member 2: For less than a fiver you can actually get a tool that actually will drill into your existing pipe and plug into your water butt, so you can do a very cheap attachment, which is sealed.

Community Member 8: Yeah, I appreciate that, but what I meant is, my downpipe is on the edge of my house so if I put a water butt, I block my back garden access and I've got nowhere else to put one. So, I would have to find an alternative place to put it, so then that's obviously a bigger cost to me than just going, "Oh, it's a £45 water butt and a £5 connection," it's obviously a lot more just because of the shape of my garden. That's all my point was.

TMcK Facilitator: So, there's clearly practical implications then, Community Member 8, based on house layout and design?

Community Member 8: Yeah, exactly.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to share my screen and we can see the question on the left-hand side, a little bit about what has been done and there's the answers to some of the questions here and some of the things from the future. But we'll focus, you can have a read through those, but I'm going to focus on the actions that as a group we're looking to see happen.

[A] So the first one there is really to try and educate and communicate to customers on the peak times for water usage, so it's not just about this carte blanche of, "Let's just stop using as much water." It's actually really going into the detail of, "These are the specific times when water usage is most at risk," so trying to allow customers to understand that a little bit better.

[B] Is there a way to look at energy companies, the electricity companies in particular, to incentivise customers to use water during non-peak hours? I'm sure there will be a discussion coming up from the team at South East Water around smart meters that will help to answer that.

[C] Is there more that can be done to provide financial incentives or just support for customers to use water-saving tools, in particular water butts? It sounds like they're quite a good, straightforward enough solution, but obviously there are some barriers for people and it's how can those be addressed, what might that look like?

[D] Providing comparative data on the impacts of water-saving actions, both between domestic and commercial. So that was a good point Community Member 6 was making there, it's like really to show what impacts are actions having? And how does that compare to others who are being asked to sacrifice water-usage times?

[E] And more widely, can the water industry as a whole get together and start pushing the onus on property developers to really help with the area of resilience and extra demand that these developments are going to be putting onto the network?

Are there any other actions, having seen the ones we've got here, do we want to add to these at all, is there anything else potentially we could put in? Alison, any thoughts from yourself?

CCW Chair: Yes. I think we've just lost a little bit of focus about the rest of this summer. So, maybe David, in your response in a minute or two, you could just perhaps reiterate some of the things that are in place now for the next 10 weeks I suppose because we've had a hot period, extreme heat in May, we've just had a week we've completed, we're about to expect the next one coming up and I can't believe we won't have a fourth one by the time we get to the end of August.

Session transcript

So, this is a really trying and testing time for you and your company, so I think a little bit more about immediate and customer-focused resilience would be really helpful. Anything more from anybody else before I hand back over to David and Oliver?

Community Member 2: Can I just question, what's the situation on water meters? I remember about 10 years ago, I got a threatening letter from South East Water saying my bill was going to go up by 50% if I didn't have a man to come and install a water meter within the next two or three months. None of my neighbours had this and so all my neighbours, that I know of, aren't on water meters. I'm just thinking, "Why aren't you mandating water meters, why is it you threatened me and I fell for it perhaps and nobody else has got water meters?"²

TMCK Facilitator: I'm sure David could potentially answer a little bit around water meters and what the plans are there. Alison, anything else before we finish off here and go back to the team?

CCW Chair: No, I think we should hand the baton back to David and as I said, we've talked quite well about some of the longer-term issues based on your conversation earlier, but I think I'm a bit concerned about the remaining 10 weeks or so of the summer. So, if you could just reiterate a little bit more about what is in place, what are your practical actions and how will we know and measure the change?

David Hinton: Sure. I'm going to try and tie some answers together and questions together in my answer. So, I've already mentioned some of the mitigation, so around power loss, communication with customers on water usage. So, obviously there is a hosepipe, a temporary use ban, as we call it, or a hosepipe ban. Typically, that reduces demand by somewhere between 5 and 10%.

CCW Chair: Really?

David Hinton: So, if you take the lower end of that range, that's equivalent to 30 million litres a day, so that is, compare that to the two – I'm trying to answer the question earlier about the businesses and I was talking about two million litres a day for those businesses. So, it really does help when customers revert to things like water butts and not use the hosepipes, so that's a significant contribution, which is really welcomed.

That is obviously going to contribute. Funnily enough, August is less, typically in the South East of England, demand is not as high with the same temperature in August as it is in June or July. One of the reasons for that is we are a net migrating population in the South East. Although we do have obviously coastal areas, not many of those are ours, with the exception of places like Whitstable. But a lot of our population leave our area in August and effectively the population goes down, so even when it's peak here, you typically get less high demand in August.

When I was talking about "peak demand" I wasn't really talking about time-of-day demand, like you might get with Economy 7 electricity, but with the electricity timing piece, it is peak days and peak weeks. So, on the hottest day of the year we saw nearly 700 million litres, just under, and our typical output is about 550, 540. When it's up that sort of level, our manufacturing capability is not equivalent to that 690, it is lower than that and so we lose storage and ultimately, worst-case scenario, that then affects customers. So that is the peak piece.

² An additional Action Point has been added to South East Water's Action Plan following the Ad Hoc Accountability Session to address this concern: Provide an update on the Compulsory Meter programme from 2018 to help those who have not been metered this way understand why and what the future plans are.

Session transcript

I'm going to tie the metering answer together with in terms of how we might charge differently peak periods as well. So, Community Member 2, I'm sorry you felt threatened by that note and I'm not quite sure how we ended up sending anything that's suggested you'd pay more if you didn't go on a meter. South East Water is the most metered company in the country. We have over 90% of our customers metered. The 10% that aren't metered are typically properties that can't be metered, so it might be where the supply is shared or a block of flats or similar and where the landlord pays the bill rather than the residents.

So, we're over 90, we're probably touching 91% now. When we put those meters in, it was a good 15 years ago we started that programme, so everyone's been in for at least 10 years. And we are now moving to smart meters; in fact, Eastern Kent is now, we've started to put smart meters in.

And they will allow us to provide different charging options for customers because the meters we've currently got, we read twice a year, and obviously you'll pretty much get a six-month volume, you don't get a daily volume, you've no idea whether someone used a lot on a Saturday, etc. But with a smart meter, customers will get more control over their bill.

But it also allows us to potentially charge less for those who use less and more for those who use more. So not having the straight, normal tariff arrangement, so a bit more of an electricity model in terms of that charging mechanism. All with the aim of the customers to be in control of their bill but also to make them aware of demand. I think the biggest benefit, this is definitely playing out, is one of the culprits of water efficiency and leakage is leaky loos. Now, I've said a lot about what we're doing, but leaky loos are really turning into a big issue.

So, I used to live in a house, as I'm sure many of you used to, that if your loo started to leak, it came out of a pipe on the side of your house and landed on your head if you walked past the house. And that's how all the old toilets were built. All the new toilets, it leaks back into the toilet, so it's almost invisible. And one leaky loo is roughly, this is a rough estimate, is equivalent to a house with three people in it. Because even though it looks like a small amount of water, it's running 24/7. And what a smart meter does, it will record constant flow and there's only one reason you have constant flow in a property, that's if there's a leak. No one uses water constantly.

CCW Chair: I'm absolutely with you on the new modern design of leaky loo and it's actually been covered on *You and Yours*, I've heard it on the *Today Programme*, so I think again I would say you've got certainly my support to go back to the Water UK, your trade association, to go back to designers of toilets and get the design changed back to the old-fashioned one, because that way, you can put the brick in that Community Member 2 and others mentioned earlier, you can actually get it resolved because you can see where you have a leak. You can't with the modern design of toilets, so I think that's one to take off and take away.

David Hinton: Just on that, I want to do a quick plug, one of the free things that we do offer is a leaky loo strip. So, you can put that on the back of the toilet and it will show you if you've got a leak. And there's also a video there how to fix it yourself. It's relatively simple.

CCW Chair: Please get some publicity out for it but also go back to the root cause of the problem, which is the design, because the design whilst being very aesthetically pleasing in a new bathroom, it's rubbish in terms of water efficiency.

Session transcript

I'd just like to pause here, because I think we need to just go back to our community to see if there's any other comments that people would like to say in terms of the actions that we've agreed or we've put up there?

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 4, do you want to jump in there?

Community Member 4: Yeah, I was wondering if there's anything that can be done about the standing charges, because they're not really very fair on people that don't use as much water? So maybe going back to the metering, whether something can be done?

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 4, what we could look to do and you need to have a good memory for this, as we're going to be covering, in our September Accountability Session, we're going to be covering a much broader sphere of questions.

This one obviously we're just focusing as much as possible on the May outage and obviously future resilience in relation to it. An excellent point, please remember it when it comes to the next Accountability Session and we'll be sure to bring it forward as a potential question. Community Member 11, do you want to jump in there?

Community Member 11: Yes, something I've been thinking about: obviously everybody's aware if they have a problem on their own property, but you drive down the road, in your local area, and lo and behold there's a leak. It's obvious that there's water seeping from the pipe. You don't know the volumes, but is there any way where ... is there something to consider maybe having an incentive approach that if people report these and it's discovered that it's really saving a lot of water, there's maybe a coupon or discounts that discounts your water as a thank you?

TMCK Facilitator: Oh, Community Member 11, I absolutely love that, that's fantastic. So, if you're the first one to report a leak, because South East Water, they don't know if there's a leak, they don't know that and they can't have eyes everywhere, so if they could obviously incentivise in a little way, customers to report when they see a leak and if they're the ones that have discovered it, you're talking about a small incentive, potentially?

Community Member 11: And also, it's so difficult, we wouldn't know, it may look like it's a small leak, but maybe it's volume and it's just running away underground. It could be ... considering that leaks are the biggest problem for South East Water as I understand it, is that something that could be considered?

TMCK Facilitator: Yeah and I think we're all very guilty, aren't we, of seeing a leak and thinking, "Oh, I'm sure someone else has reported that." So, I think if there's some kind of bonus for us to try and be the first one to do that, that would be very useful. Folks, is there anything to add? I'm conscious of time, we've got half an hour left, which is just about the right amount of time for Question 3, so before we move on, anything else we want to add to the list of actions that we're seeing here? No, okay, fabulous. In that case, I'm going to stop sharing the screen momentarily and I'm going to hand back to Alison, who is going to...

CCW Chair: Thank you and thank you very much indeed, David and Oliver, for your contribution to that. I know it's a difficult issue and I know we went off topic a little bit, we came back and I got involved in leaky loos, which I also feel very passionate about, but there we go. Right, so we have a lovely third question and it is Community Member 7 who's going to introduce this for us.

Session transcript

Community Member 7: Hi everyone. Customers now need clear, local and practical information, not only during outages, but also during restrictions. How will South East Water warn, update and reassure customers at a postcode or local-area level before, during and after incidents? How will it communicate the Kent hosepipe restrictions clearly to all customers including people who do not use social media or email? How will South East Water show customers the positive impact their actions are having – for example, whether restrictions are reducing demand, helping storage levels recover and reducing the risk of further low pressure or supply interruptions – and where would this information be published and updated so customers can see the benefit of their actions?

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Community Member 7. This particular point I would really like to hand over to David and Oliver and again I'm going to repeat it, please be as specific as possible, set out what you're already doing, what's already in place, what you've learned as a result of the May incident that contributes to this, what's changing, timing and above all, how do we see ... I mean this question is all about how do your customers see the positive impact that your actions are having in terms of whether it's reducing demand or helping storage levels recover? I'm going to hand the baton over to you.

David Hinton: Thank you, good question. So, we are conscious that people take information in loads of different ways. So, when we put a hosepipe ban out in particular, we try and use as many different channels to communicate as possible. So, you're absolutely right, there's obviously the electronic ones, so there's the social media channels, we use all of those. We email customers directly and obviously we only email those affected, so the customer we can ringfence geographical areas in terms of emailing.

Over the last 18 months, we've had what we call an 'AquAlerter system', which is a targeted SMS capability, which is also geographically defined, so we can hit individual ... we can even hit individual roads and we do that when we have a burst, for example, we can SMS customers. We've got something like 60% penetration on phone numbers and it's very easy to register, if you go on 'In My Area' on our website, you can get updates about your local water supply. So, we use SMS, then we also, for those who are not necessarily picking up on digital, we did a number of radio interviews, TV interviews and I think probably South East Water tends to be featured in quite a lot of printed material, printed press.

So, we're across pretty much every media channel in terms of the notification of the hosepipe ban. In terms of the effectiveness of the hosepipe ban and customers can see the benefit of their actions, we continue over the summer, particularly on social media, but you're probably right to say that we might not do it across everything, I need to refresh myself on that, about what the demand has been doing since the inclusion of the hosepipe ban. And like I said, obviously we've got that data, that's why I gave you the 5-10% reduction that we see.

I think it would be important as a good action to say how localised should we be on just informing customers of their contribution to the water supply balance, for want of a better expression? Because I think that would be a positive, reinforcing message. We do it, I'm just not quite clear on how widely we communicate that message.

But I think that's a good point and one for the list, we definitely will pick up on. But we try and use every media out there possible to communicate both the fact it's on and then just perhaps not quite as widely but I'll have to see, on the effect that it's having. But it definitely has an effect, it's definitely a positive effect for the customers and on the environment, because that's where we take the water from.

Session transcript

CCW Chair: David, what are the customer sectors that you're struggling to get to and what plans have you got to try and reach them?

David Hinton: Like I say, we have got our penetration on 'My Account', which is effectively our app, is somewhere around 75% and our penetration on SMS is somewhere around 50%. So, we've got quite a high penetration on the digital area. And then we use the media and the press. You might have even seen Ollie do some interviews, so media and press and radio interviews for those who are potentially not on that digital market.

CCW Chair: What are you doing to improve that 50% and get it up and improve?

David Hinton: We are very keen and we encourage customers whenever they contact us to join one of those digital pieces. And because it just means that we can inform them more easily about any issue they might be having with their local water supply. You can register for that and you will have definitely – if you're in the Kent area and you register, you will get an AquAlerter message about the hosepipe ban.

CCW Chair: Do you promote the AquAlerter when you're on the radio and television and in print?

David Hinton: Yeah and talking – the biggest communication we have is we talk to customers every day, so on Direct Debits, on billing changes, on moving house and anything like that. So, we also do that on a daily basis, hundreds of customers every day. But we also promote it on other channels too.

CCW Chair: I'm going to be challenging and ask you what's your biggest success in the last couple of months to get in touch with customers and what's your biggest disappointment?

David Hinton: Well, the AquAlerter system, which is a bit longer than that, but is a really useful tool and we've got some really positive feedback because we use that regularly. So, when we need to interrupt customer supply to repair a burst maybe for a couple of hours, we can keep the customer fully informed of "It's going to happen, it's happening, it's been resolved, you should now run your tap." So, we can go step-by-step, very much with a battle with them that we've got with customers. We know we get that on other services.

CCW Chair: What's your biggest disappointment then?

David Hinton: I guess our biggest disappointment is understanding individual customer's water usage and therefore making it as targeted as possible. Which is I think where the smart meters are going to really, really help. Because we can then talk to customers with high usage or high peak usage and discuss whether they want a water butt? Do they want a different approach? Would they like a subsidy?

We are looking to subsidise more and more water butts going forward and not only water butts, but also, as you rightly say, Alison, we are really lobbying government for changes to housing development requirements and housing stock principles, if you like. I can't remember the expression. Housing standards, effectively. So, things like the loos you talked about, but not only that, it's much easier to put a grey water recycling, as we call it, solution into a new property than it is into an existing one.

CCW Chair: It is.

Session transcript

David Hinton: So that is very much not just South East Water but the whole industry. More from us in the South East, we are more pressurised on water resources than anywhere else in the country. But that is very much something we are pushing developers to do, to try and make the houses as water neutral as possible. And if you only use water for hygiene purposes, your water will be considerably less than what you might call the discretionary water use and that's where grey water is great.

CCW Chair: I was very interested in one of the comments from our community a bit earlier this evening about they would like to receive a letter, even if they weren't affected. I think this was Community Member 2, who is not in an affected area, Eastern Kent, but he would like to know more about what was being done in those areas that were affected by drought and hosepipe bans and water supply interruptions. Is there more in your plans to talk to consumers, to customers, at every touchpoint about what you are doing to keep people informed using good, plain English? There is so much that could be done on that front.

David Hinton: Yeah, it's a very interesting question about how much communication people want when it's not directly relevant to their own water supply. And again, like you say, that was one of the suggestions on Question 1, I think, and that felt like something we ought to explore. When we bring something like this in, we're not a bunch of executives sitting in the room; we'll get a focus group together and we'll discuss it with the customers and see what they think and we'll go from there. That's how we've developed a lot of our communications, using that route.

CCW Chair: I think customers would like to know are restrictions such as hosepipe bans actually affecting demand, is it making an impact? So individual action, does it make an impact at peak times? So, it's that sort of thing that perhaps is worth exploring in more detail in your focus groups because that's something that's really coming through from this evening's group.

David Hinton: Yeah, I agree, I think that's a ... Like I say, I'm sure we do it, I don't know quite how widely we do it. I follow us on all the social media and particularly Instagram is my go-to social media thing.

CCW Chair: Yeah, but not everybody is on digital.

David Hinton: And that's why I say I need to just check how widely we do that; we definitely do it on social media.

CCW Chair: I think reliance on digital is insufficient, particularly with the elderly population, disabled, not everybody can afford smartphones. We've just got to be aware of those sorts of things. I need to really pass over to Nicky, who will manage this next section. Thank you, David.

David Hinton: Pleasure.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks all, thanks Alison. This part of the discussion is where we can sort of build upon what we've heard from David and from Alison, the discussion that we've been listening to, specifically in relation to the question that was asked, which was how can we communicate better, how could South East Water build trust with customers and what as a customer are you wanting to receive and how are you wanting to receive it?

Obviously, there are lots of things going on at the moment to try and improve the demand versus what's available. How far does South East Water need to go in terms of communicating to you what's been done, how successful it's being and what's happening next? So, these are the sort of actions we need to be considering. I guess just to open the floor up, has anyone got any thoughts on what we've heard and on those action points? Community Member 3, do you want to jump in?

Session transcript

Community Member 3: I think it's about not just about knowing the incidents leading up to water shortages, but it's also during those events where it would give us more hope that things are being done to reduce the likelihood of the length of water shortages, but also what's happening afterwards as well to make sure that we're not going round in circles, of a continuous loop of drought, water supply and then another drought.

It seems that we're going down that very murky road at the moment and I can't see it getting any better. I know there's very mitigating circumstances for that, but I think it's a case of keeping us in the loop as regards to the elements of everything from the journey, from the start to the end, to make sure that as a customer, it gives us more trust in South East Water going forwards.

TMCK Facilitator: I think trust is a big point, Community Member 3, and it certainly is something that when we go out into the communities, it seems to be something that's a very hot topic in terms of the relationship between customers and the water suppliers. So, to your point, it's about getting that pertinent information of what is being done right now and how has it been done and how is that going to impact things going forward to get that reassurance that they're doing everything that they can? For you, Community Member 3, how would you want to receive that information?

Community Member 3: Well, for me personally, I'm not digitally excluded as such, so therefore for me personally, a text message, an email is sufficient, with hyperlinks so I can go onto somewhere else to find out more information about my local area predominantly.

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 12, you've got your hand up, do you want to jump in?

Community Member 12: Yeah, my one is more about the people. I think local authorities need to work better with the water company, with the schools, the care homes, the community officers, I think there needs to be a bit more communication through those channels, especially around hosepipes because I've seen neighbours using hosepipes. There's no real enforcement of hosepipe bans, I don't know what strategies [inaudible] hosepipe ban, but it's more about the community.

TMCK Facilitator: So further community engagement that can really help get this across?

Community Member 3: Yeah, I think so, even if you've got a neighbour who isn't on text message but you could get a message across to them to help someone. And noticeboards as well.

TMCK Facilitator: Any other thoughts in terms of when it comes to these outages that are happening right now, what can South East Water do to build trust, how can they contact you, communicate with you to help you get onside and do what we need to do in terms of water usage?

Community Member 11: Community Member 3 mentioned the idea of a hyperlink, because it's a delicate balance. You keep pestering, some customers think they're being pestered if they see emails all the time. But if it was brief and to the point, saying, "If you want more information, here's the hyperlink," seems to make a lot more sense and allows people to then gauge how much involvement, how much information they want.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: In terms of the sort of communications that South East Water could put out, would it be useful – I know we've sort of covered this, but would it be useful for them just to show you the actual impact that ... I think David had mentioned a sort of 5-10% reduction and usage due to the hosepipe ban – would you want that to be highlighted in some way to show the impact it's having in a positive sense? Would that be of use to you as customers?

Community Member 9: Yeah, I agree, I think it should do. And I think they need to have an honest narrative with the customer base and so if it rains for the next two weeks, then do they pull their hosepipe ban off immediately? I don't want the hosepipe ban to go the whole way through the summer if it's pouring down for the next six weeks. But I'm doubtful whether it would be revoked and that's where I am with this sort of stuff.

To me the hosepipe ban is their 'get out of jail card', the compensation route is their 'get out of jail card'. "Oh, we've got a lot of leaks, we've got a lot of outages, we'll just compensate everybody." They've been far too used to using these things to just bail people out. I feel strongly that actually if rainfall comes, then this should be, the hosepipe ban should be revoked and I think I've said my point there. But I think they just go back to the same playlist to make life easy for themselves, which is basically paper over the cracks for donkey's years.

But now they've been found out, that's actually what I feel quite strongly actually, quite passionately. The compensation can't work and certainly these short-term bans can't work just during the summer. We're paying for water. If I want to water my garden, I would like to be able to do that. So, I do feel quite strongly about all these things, actually.

CCW Chair: I think that's a really valid point, Community Member 9, but I think I'm very struck by what David said which is that a hosepipe ban actually makes a difference of 5-10% and my initial reaction was, "Well, that's not very much." But in reality, if that's the difference between keeping within the manufacturing and storage capacity or exceeding it and having problems, then that is worth knowing. But it's how do you communicate that visually and in a way that we as customers can understand, so that we appreciate that any small actions we take make a difference?

So, I think there's maybe more that we can do at CCW with the water companies to try and find ways of visually saying, "A small bit done by everybody makes a difference; serious bits done by businesses at peak times, even when you're tankering it in free for them; doing the Octopus Energy peak demand bit, there's more that we could explore on that." And maybe we can take that offline? But I think I'm very much looking at the time and I think we need to just share the screen with the actions that we've got, Nicky?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, of course. Just very quickly, on the subject of communication. It comes up in every single Accountability Session we do. Can I ask everyone to raise your hand for me if you think that South East Water should communicate more often with you about the sort of issues we've been discussing today, or less often? So more often, put your hand up?

Okay, so just about everyone, I think there's two people that don't have their hand up, so just about everyone put their hand up. So, there is clearly a need for the correct level of communication to be met and the messages to get out there. So, I think that certainly needs to be one of the actions that we take from this. I'm going to share my screen and again I'm going to run through the responses.

So, we've got the "We did" section, where we sort of summarised the response from David and what's happening into the future in relation to customers.

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In terms of the actions, we're looking at here, so again I'll read these out and then we can have a bit of a chat through them.

[A] Keeping customers in the loop on issues throughout the investigation and resolution process and onwards to mitigation strategies. This can be done via text messaging and emails with hyperlinks. Again, the key message is this will allow customers to explore in their own time the things that they find interesting for themselves.

[B] Looking to strike the balance on outreach for issues, so it needs to be concise and to the point again with links to further info.

[C] Explain to customers what has been done to reduce the length of the outages. Just really again, explain that in detail where required but allow people to explore themselves to find out what that means in their actual area, because obviously not all areas are impacted, but when you see it on the news, they worry and you think, "Okay, this is a blanket hosepipe ban, what's happening and what's the way out of this?"

[D] Further community engagement to get the message across. Obviously sending letters is expensive, but are there other ways to access the digitally excluded people that are out there through community engagement, schools, support officers, etc?

[E] Highlight to customers the positive impact of current strategies that the hosepipe ban are having. So, show people that you are sacrificing potentially your garden or plants, or whatever it happens to be, but here's the impact it's having. Just that 5 and 10%, which Alison mentioned, didn't sound that much but it is a vital cog in the supply and demand infrastructure that South East Water are playing within.

Are there any other actions here, folks, that we think we need to cover, or any points that you want to add based on what you're seeing on the screen? Community Member 12, you've got your hand up, but I don't know whether this is another legacy hand?

Community Member 12: No, it not, I had it on earlier about using acronyms, so like 5% saving is an equivalent of a million washing machine spins, or filling up, saving 50 baths, using something that quantifies the saving to a normal consumer like me.

TMcK Facilitator: Olympic swimming pools is always a classic, isn't it?

Community Member 12: Yeah, or a football pitch or a bath or a washing cycle, something like that. I think that always lands better from a consumer point that actually the hosepipe is going to save a million washing machines, or something like that.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 1, I'm going to come to you, you've not spoken for a while. What are your thoughts in what we're seeing here in terms of actions, can we add anything, are we happy?

Community Member 1: From a personal point of view, I always know when the hosepipe bans are on, which come to us every year, but I never know when it's going to be finished. Like you said, we're into September/October, pouring with rain and you've had waterlogged gardens and they've still got a hosepipe ban but you'd maybe like to clean the car. You're thinking, "Well, there's enough water coming down now, but I've not heard that the hosepipe ban has been lifted."

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, good point. Community Member 7?

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Community Member 7: Yeah, basically one of the actions I feel like you really need to add is the fact, what about people who are not on social media who maybe they don't really have an email address or something like that? I feel maybe there has to be something like letter or something like that, that can help out too. It doesn't have to be maybe if you don't have an email address, or maybe social media, or even a phone number as well, so I feel probably maybe letters and stuff like that can really help out.

TMcK Facilitator: Any other thoughts on what we're seeing just now, anything to add? Community Member 8?

Community Member 8: I know a lot of the action plans are currently for the here and now, but just as a bit of food for thought, the younger generation, because these are the next lot of generation under us, so my boy and that, they're going to have these issues and more. Is it not easier to try and get into schools, be it primary or secondary. Like we all knew about never play with matches and fireflies and check the road, we had the hedgehog. Something like that to try and help futureproof as well, of going, "Let's not waste water," let's almost get ahead of the curve, not be behind it.

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, I think we can certainly add that into the action around community outreach for sure, I think that's a great point, get the kids onside and educate from a young age. Any other thoughts?

CCW Chair: I'd like to throw the baton back to David and Oliver, please, to just comment very quickly on the actions we've suggested here in terms of is there anything here that's operationally or financially or legally difficult? Is there constraints on communication? I know it's a difficult subject, some of it's too much communication, for others it's not enough and I know that you're committed to exploring how much more to get to people and in what channels. But any comments, quickly, on what you've seen?

David Hinton: Not hugely. I mean, I agree and it is a balance and the balance we test, like I said before, we use focus groups and other mechanisms to say, "Is this the sort of information the way you want to see it?" And that is very much what drives how we think about things. I mean the point about showing progress, I think is a really good one and that we covered earlier, I think that is a really good one because having an observable contribution to something I think is really important.

And the hosepipe bans themselves are not a South East Water designed intervention; they're part of the overall water framework that we all plan to. It's designed to mean that we don't take as much water from the environment, that's the reason. And that link we don't always make as clear as we possibly could, I think. Because if we just met infinite demand, the South East of the UK would look like Morocco.

So, it's a balance of the whole, not just water companies but all the regulators, to try and find a balance between ensuring there's enough water for customers to do what they want to do with it, but equally, that the rivers have got a flow and that it maintains fish and the flora and fauna has got enough so that it doesn't dry out. So that's the whole balance of the water industry, is trying to provide that balance. And I don't think we make that as clear as we could because a lot of customers don't spend a lot of time thinking about water. I understand why they don't spend a lot of time thinking about water.

CCW Chair: How frequently do you do customer focus groups to talk about communications?

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David Hinton: It all depends if we're thinking of changing it and obviously we use forums like this as well as we obviously get a lot of direct communication with customers, writing to us, talking to us, so we're constantly listening to customer views on this, because we're not in a bubble.

CCW Chair: I think all companies would say they listen to their customers by those means, but I'm just thinking about whether it's worth you actually doing a complete reset from the bottom down and a clean sheet of paper about what is it we need to communicate, what is it that customers want to hear and how best do we reach them and how do they want to be reached? Because you can always look at it from the company's point of view, but you should also be looking at it from the customers' point of view. And ideally, you take the customer first and then you match into that. So, I would just lodge with you...

David Hinton: That's exactly right. I mean we haven't got a corporate communication strategy, we've got a customer communication strategy. And we're trying to achieve the same thing generally as customers. So, we want to keep supplies...

CCW chair: Yeah, I'm just saying, ask your customer communications people when they last did a reset and whether it's worth having a complete review of what you do. Because I think we've heard lots this evening about "we'd like more communication, we'd like communication on what you've done, as well as what's happening." So, I think on that note, I'm just going to finish, because I'm very conscious of people's time.

So, I would just like to say thank you to everybody. We've covered some big issues that link to that disruption in South East Water event in Kent. We put together a whole series of actions, which have been raised by your genuine customers here. You've had a chance to talk about them and comment upon them and they've been captured live. This will form the basis of your formal response back to CCW on this in terms of this Accountability [Session], which is an ad hoc one, out of sequence of the spring and autumn one.

Just to remind everybody that the next steps, so we will have a full transcript of this session published on the website within seven working days, but before that, all participants will have a look at it, so that you can review it and raise any concerns relating to personal comments. I think that's very important in terms of privacy and being fair and polite and respectful. We will propose to publish proposed actions within seven working days and South East Water you're committed, thank you, to publishing your action plan within 28 [working] days and setting out how you're going to deliver the commitments on some of the issues, the issues that we've agreed tonight.

Then customers, we are going to be asking you whether that action plan actually reflects what we think was agreed. And CCW, your role is to monitor progress and report publicly on delivery. Because that way, we drive change on both sides and better understanding on both sides. It's really trying to design a process that ensures transparency and follow through, so it's not just an empty discussion. But most of all, I really want to thank all of you for your time and for your thought and your honesty and for your engagement.

To every one of the community members here tonight in South East Water's areas, thank you for bringing forward your real-life experiences because anybody in business will know that listening to genuine, real customers, in person, is fabulous. So, thank you for that. And thank you to you David for your listening skills, for being very fleet of foot with your comments and your pitches back to the questions, that's much appreciated. Oliver, we'd have loved to have heard more from you in terms of your perspective on this, but I'm sure you'll be engaged with your successor.

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David Hinton: That was my fault, Ollie's used to me just not wanting to shut up about water, I'm sorry, I should have let Ollie talk a bit more, apologies for that.

Oliver Martin: That's completely fine, don't worry.

CCW Chair: That's all right, I did try and bring him in. But David I am very aware that you are moving on and I would very much like just to reiterate that my perspective is that all that we've discussed this evening, all that we've suggested as actions that we're committing to following through, this is you, David Hinton, as CEO of South East Water, in your official capacity, not so much as your personal capacity, but this will be documented and distributed amongst your senior exec team and responded to and in the handover pack, I would hope to your successor?

David Hinton: Sure, absolutely right.

CCW Chair: Right, thank you. So unless there's anything else from anybody else, I'm going to say again thank you for your time, I appreciate that it's in the evening and everyone's got things to do. But it is really appreciated, it's made a genuine difference and I've learned so much from both our water community, you customers, real people, it's lovely to have met you. And from Oliver and David, thank you very much indeed for your engagement. So, I will say good night and thank you.

[CLOSE]