

Summary report

Ad hoc Accountability Session with South West Water

This Accountability Session was triggered because Water Voice Barometer survey results show that South West Water's trust score has been consistently around 30% lower than the average water company trust score.



Ad hoc Accountability Session | Tuesday 4th August 2026

Report published: Monday 24th August

Community members had the opportunity to question the CEO at South West Water directly about the continuing loss of trust and the company's response to customer concerns.

They raised the issues that mattered most to them, including how South West Water will address the continuing loss of trust, deliver visible improvements and ensure senior leaders are held accountable. South West Water responded to these questions on the night.

Several members shared lived experiences of pollution, illness, service failures, loss of trust and lack of accountability. Two questions were then put to the newly appointed CEO, allowing time for full responses. The questions are outlined below and CCW are working to refine the actions to send to South West Water.

Q1. Reasons for continuing loss of trust

These experiences are why trust in South West Water is not simply low. For some customers, it has gone completely. People feel that serious concerns have been dismissed and that their lived experience too often conflicts with the company's statements and actions.

In February 2025, South West Water's previous CEO apologised to Parliament and said lessons had been learned. You are a relatively new CEO, but customers still live with the consequences of decisions and failures under previous leadership.

Do you personally recognise, and accept, the scale of the harm caused and the depth of the continuing loss of trust in South West Water? Will you give an unqualified apology, and will you set out your short, medium and long-term strategy for rebuilding trust, ensuring that honesty, accountability and customer safety come before protecting profits? How will you ensure these changes last beyond your own time as CEO?

Q2. A forward look into how to rebuild trust

These experiences are why customers are no longer reassured by lists of projects, investment figures or actions the company says have been completed. What matters is whether pollution visibly reduces, services become more reliable and communities see lasting local change.

We know South West Water already has targets for environmental pollution, drinking water quality and service reliability. How will you turn those targets into visible, lasting local improvements and prove that rebuilding trust is changing how the company operates, rather than becoming a set of seemingly empty promises while business continues as usual?

If outcomes or deadlines are missed, how will this be reported openly, who will be held accountable and, as CEO, what consequences are you prepared to put in place for senior leadership to show customers that these commitments carry real weight?



What happens next?

Once potential actions are agreed CCW will send this report to South West 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. 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.

Session transcript

Attendance list

Keith Haslett	Chief Executive Officer of Pennon Group
Joe Greenwood	Associate Director of Taylor McKenzie Research – Lead facilitator
Alison Austin	Non-Exec Director and Board Member for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
10x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under South West Water

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Everyone, thank you very much for joining us again on another hot evening, although some of you have had the bliss of some rain. My name is Alison Austin and I'm a member of the Consumer Council for Water Board, I'm a non-exec there, and I'm chairing this evening's discussion. Tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme and the purpose of this is simple but very important; it's to give customers a stronger and more direct voice in how their water company performs, communicates and improves. And this particular ad-hoc Accountability Session has been arranged because Water Voice evidence showed particularly low trust in South West Water and customers linked this to serious personal and health impacts, to service disruption, to pollution, to concerns not being taken seriously and reported progress by South West Water not matching what they experience in real life.

What we heard was that this loss of trust is not based on one incident or one area of performance. Community members described serious personal health impacts and it just is all about where the customer is not seeing what the company is promising or it's not matching what they can see or smell or personally experience.

This evening, we're going to explore whether South West Water actually recognises that harm and how its leadership will rebuild trust, how customers will see lasting change and what consequences will follow if promised improvements are not delivered. And so, I would stress it's not a complaints hearing and it's not a technical enquiry but it's a structured, with the help of Taylor McKenzie, customer-led conversation focusing on acknowledgement, accountability, learning and agreeing clear and practical actions.

The topics we're going to cover have been shaped by your customers, South West Water's customers, through a pre-task and a briefing discussion that we had last week and that's important because this is a customers' agenda and it's built around their lived experiences and the questions they want South West Water, you, Keith, as Group Chief Executive, to answer.

It's going to follow a slightly different structure from our usual Accountability Sessions as per the ones that ran last spring. So rather than three questions, we're going to explore two much broader questions in greater depth. Before each question, several community members are going to briefly share their own experiences and this is intended really to ensure that you, South West Water, can hear the human and the local reality behind the question before responding, so it's about giving real context.

The first question's going to focus on recognising harm and taking responsibility and rebuilding trust and the second's going to focus on proving change through visible improvements and the consequences when promised outcomes are just not delivered. We hope and expect this to be a constructive but challenging discussion. Our customers here on the panel tonight should feel able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and expectations, but equally we expect clear, direct, concise but transparent responses from South West Water, you, Keith, yourself.

The session's being fully transcribed and the transcript and proposed actions will be published online following the session. But before that, South West Water will be expected to publish an action plan responding to the commitments made and we really feel strongly that this transparency is a key part of what makes it all a meaningful process and worth everyone's time and involvement.

In terms of ground rules, we will take one person at a time. I would ask everyone to listen respectfully, particularly while community members are sharing personal experiences and in the response from Keith. We will try to keep contributions focused and concentrate on what

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must now change, what action will be taken, by when, who will be responsible and how customers will know genuinely whether it has made a difference.

I hate jargon so forgive me if I ask for acronyms to be explained or a technical statement to be explained. Where an answer's unclear or doesn't address the question, myself or Joe Greenwood from Taylor McKenzie will ask for a bit more detail and for it to be explained. Because we're online, if I could ask you to stay on mute when you're not speaking, use the raise hand function and Joe and I will monitor that if you want to come in and use the chat if you want to add a short point or flag a technical issue.

I'd like to now go around and briefly introduce those joining us this evening. First, our Independent Lead Facilitator, Joe Greenwood from Taylor McKenzie, who's going to guide our discussion, we'll say hello from him and then I'll walk our way round. Joe, a very quick one from you and where are you based?

TMcK Facilitator: Hey folks, I'm up in Glasgow. I think we've all met before. Hopefully I won't need to speak as much this time because I think I was boring you last time, so I'm looking forward to the discussion.

CCW Chair: I'll just work my way round the pictures on my screen, if you would just say where you're from and your name, that would be very helpful. I'm going to start with Community Member 1.

Community Member 1: Hi, I'm Community Member 1 from Hayle in Cornwall.

Community Member 2: I'm in North Devon and my name's Community Member 2.

Community Member 3: My name's Community Member 3. I live near Newton Abbott, just inside Dartmoor National Park.

Community Member 4: Hello, Keith, nice to meet you. My name's Community Member 4 and I live in a rural area in mid Cornwall.

Community Member 5: Hi, my name is Community Member 5 and I live in Paignton in Devon.

Community Member 6: Hi, I'm Community Member 6 and I live in Plymouth. Nice to see you all.

Community Member 7: I'm Community Member 7 and I live in Plymouth in Devon.

Community Member 8: Hi, Keith, I'm Community Member 8 and I live in Tiverton in mid Devon.

Community Member 9: I'm Community Member 9 and I live in Cornwall.

Community Member 10: I'm Community Member 10 and I'm from Plympton in Plymouth.

CCW Chair: Keith, we have a whole range of your customers from South West Water and diversity of geographical regions. Perhaps you could introduce yourself and tell us where you live because we're keen to know if you experience and enjoy the beaches and waterways that our panellists would like to do so?

Keith Haslett: Good evening, everybody. It's a pleasure to meet all of you. As I've been introduced, I am the CEO of Pennon [Group] and clearly that includes South West Water, based here in Exeter. My wife and boys have been on Exmouth Beach for the last two days enjoying themselves in the sunshine, so very much taking part in the amenities here.

Session transcript

CCW Chair Have you moved there permanently, down to Devon?

Keith Haslett: No, I have this place during the week and then I've got my family based outside of that.

CCW Chair: It's nice to know that like all good hoteliers, you actually use your rooms and use your bathrooms and the analogy is that you're using your beaches and waterways. That's very comforting for us to know that you are too a customer of your own company.

Keith Haslett: I have my own house here in Exeter, just to be clear, yeah.

CCW Chair: Thank you again, everyone, for giving up your evening on top of your working days to be here this evening. Now I'm going to hand over to Joe to begin the discussion.

TMCK Facilitator: Thank you, folks. I just wanted to give you a little bit of an introduction to the session. I talked to you last week about what we were going to be doing today and I wanted to give you a little bit more information as to the exact flow, if you like, of the session itself.

Before we do that, I want to talk about the transcripts and how that will work. Obviously, we've all joined the conversation here; you guys have joined in first name only. In the transcript itself, your name won't be mentioned at all; customer names will be redacted entirely from the published article. After the session, you'll be able to review the transcript, request anything that you have said to be removed or further anonymised, should you wish to do so. We won't ask questions about that, if you want something to be removed, we'll simply remove it, so please do let us know when the transcript comes through if that is something that you want us to do. The transcript is intended to provide an accurate record of the discussion and the agreed actions; it isn't about being able to identify you individually as customers.

For both of the questions, several community members will share brief lived experiences to set the context, a formal question will be asked and then Keith will have the opportunity to respond in 10 minutes or ever so slightly more, if Alison deems it necessary.

Community members will then discuss the response, you'll identify what remains unanswered, agree any actions and outcomes that you expect South West Water to include in its action plan off the back of what's been said. I've got a couple of my colleagues who are in the conversation today, that's Peter and Emma who are listening in and they're going to be working away in the background, putting these actions into a document that I'm going to share with you at some point during the session. So, they're going to capture these actions live and then they'll be shared on the screen for you to review and we can then talk about those. That will make a lot of sense when you actually see it.

Once we've discussed different actions and we've created something that you guys are happy with, we'll then give Keith the opportunity to provide a response to the actions, including where you consider the actions unclear or outside of control or not feasible. It's really about looking for kind of red flags in the things that we're asking for there. Any kind of constraints and disagreements will be discussed and then recorded, obviously, in the transcript.

Some issues may connect to existing South West Water commitments. We don't expect that this is going to be the case, but we will see in terms of the action plans that we've been part of creating. We're not asking for these to simply be repeated. We want evidence of whether we're going to see, I suppose, lasting, visible improvement: what further action is needed and who will be accountable if promised outcomes are not achieved?

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This webinar has been made available for livestreaming; there are some people who are viewing. We've got a decent number, about 20 people who are viewing the session currently; I expect that to go up and down as the session progresses. We've got people from the CCW team, Ofwat and South West Water, as well as other observers from CCW. Observers are listening only or listening and viewing, they're not able to take part so at no point will they be interacting with you during this session.

Any questions on that from anyone before we move forward? Fantastic, okay, thank you so much. Alison, back to you.

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Joe, for the rubric, so to speak, about how we're going to do it. So I'm going to kick off with the first question to be asked and the context to this is going to be provided by Community Member 2, Community Member 3 and then Community Member 5, and then Community Member 5 will ask the question. I really do want to thank everybody for agreeing to share your story this evening. Some of it's quite difficult, I know, because it's very serious and has affected your lives but it's really important for us to hear. So I'm going to pass over to Community Member 2 first to share her story.

Community Member 2: I did it as a statement because I'm still in the middle of medical treatment as a result but I'm just going to read what I wrote, if you don't mind:

I've lived on the North Devon coast with my family since 2012, when we relocated from London. I was born and brought up in South Devon and my husband Cornwall, and we wanted our then 6-year-old daughter to have the same upbringing with us, swimming and surfing. I know there were issues around water quality back then through my local Surfers Against Sewerage group and when they launched that app in 2014, we always checked to make sure where the overflows were when they'd been opened and we always avoided going in the sea.

In subsequent years, our daughter did suffer from a gastrointestinal infection when she was 8, as well as eye infections, as she surfs a lot, but came home telling us stories about paddling out past smelly slicks that contained tampons, pads and other debris, but most surfers do get these issues because they just love their sport.

In 2023, I became very unwell after swimming off my favourite beach, at which there was, at that time, a practice called "dry spillages" happening, which were never notified to the EA. It was a beautiful sunny day and a green tick on my app, so all was good except it wasn't. I was very unwell and I ended up at North Devon District Hospital in A&E with a gastric problem that took weeks to settle and in fact never really has.

I stayed out of the water for nearly two years as it really played with my mental health. The thing that I loved since my childhood was now scaring me. South West Water was fined by the EA, a paltry £1,500 and I was offered £30 off my water bill.

I'm now seeing a specialist gastric consultant who has confirmed after many biopsies, that I have a deep-rooted helicobacter pylori infection that's been there for some years, hence my continuing issues. I am on medication to eradicate it and on 16th August [2026], I've got a fibro scan for my liver because he does feel that it's gone there as well and also, a gastroscopy in the afternoon to see if things are definitely improving my stomach.

My question really is, why can't sewerage be treated before being released? To me, treating human waste seems to basically what we're paying for our water bills. It clearly states water supply and sewerage as two definite things on our bills and yet the basics are not being dealt with and I want to know why because I've been left with this bacterial infection.

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CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 2, that's really hard to recount and it's hard for us to hear. Thank you and a big hug down the phone to you and the email to you and the Teams and Zoom to you. Can I please pass the baton to Community Member 3.

Community Member 3: My situation is much less harrowing, and I have immense sympathy for Community Member 2, but I still do not trust South West Water. As I say, this is not really because of my direct experience of them as a customer; I have no massive issues with my water supply apart from the significant increases in my bills in recent years. I turn on a tap and usually clean water comes out. We've had a few occasions where we've lost supply due to burst mains and I'm also irritated by the numerous leaks that occur in our area and the way they are often patched rather than repaired. But these are things that cause some upset, even anger, but not total loss of trust.

My big issue with South West Water is the frequent releases of untreated sewage into rivers and the sea over many years. The loss of trust results from their failure to deal adequately with these incidents while rewarding shareholders and executives with large payouts when that money could have been invested in upgrading infrastructure. The situation is exacerbated by their denials, cover-ups and deflections, as highlighted in the TV series, *Dirty Business*.

Now we're being asked to fund, through increases in our bills, infrastructure improvements to deal with this problem but the widespread of pollution of our waterways is continuing. I have no trust in South West Water because of their past actions and nothing has happened so far to make me change my view. Thank you.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 3. Thank you for sharing that with us. And now to turn to Community Member 5. If you could share your story, please. And can I ask that you give a brief pause after your statement before you articulate the question, which will allow Joe to put it up on our screen and to share the screen. Please, if you would share your story first.

Community Member 5: I live in the area affected by the Brixham outbreak. How your situation was handled has massively reduced my trust in South West Water. A few days before it was announced, customers were asking you on social media channels if water was safe and you kept telling people it was fine when it wasn't. I kept an eye on this as my children were young and have disabilities; I didn't want them to get sick.

Once it was announced, schools, houses, nurseries, etc. were told they could not use tap water. My oldest daughter's school is the largest primary school in Torbay and no water was provided for several days. The school had to send teachers out to buy water themselves at local supermarkets. 630 children at the school plus teachers, so it was a lot of bottles that they had to keep going out to get.

We also had to boil water at home and send this into school with our children so the school didn't get shut down. My youngest daughter was also at nursery and at that time they had to boil all the water for the small babies up to the toddler ages. It was a nightmare for them as no water was provided by you, despite social media posts, etc. saying water had been provided to the areas, until you could say which specific ones were affected.

The whole situation was handled really badly and I've not seen any communication from you explaining that you have learned from how badly it was dealt with at the start.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 5. We're now going to have the question brought up and then if you would articulate the question. Joe has started screen sharing, here we are.

Session transcript

Community Member 5: These experiences are why trust in South West Water is not simply low. For customers, it has gone completely. People feel that serious concerns have been dismissed and that their lived experience too often conflicts with the company's statements and actions.

In February 2025, South West Water's previous CEO apologised to Parliament and said lessons had been learned. You are a relatively new CEO, but customers still live with the consequences of decisions and failures under previous leadership. Do you personally recognise and accept the scale of harm caused and the depth of the continuing loss of trust in South West Water?

Will you give an unqualified apology, and will you set out your short, medium and long-term strategy for rebuilding trust, ensuring that honesty, accountability and customer safety comes before protecting profits? How will you ensure that these changes last beyond your own time as CEO?

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that, Community Member 5. Keith, the baton now gets passed to you to respond. I think there's about 10-12 minutes so it's really about being very focused and very direct and I would ask you to focus your response really in terms of the whole trust issues and what we've just raised. It's been put in the chat, if you have the chat box open.

Keith Haslett: First of all, I've been in this role 4 months, I've been in this industry 25 years and listening to those, I guess, customers, particularly you, Community Member 2, I recognise that those underlying conditions, clearly I sympathise immensely for you and your family.

We obviously have been working very hard to effectively reverse what has been a system that's spilled for many years and your incident is recognised by us, so for that, if that's linked with us then we would absolutely apologise on that basis, by all means.

We are in a position now where we are working very hard to invest in the infrastructure, reduce the amount of spills in the sewer network that has been designed to spill for many, many decades; that's just the way the system has been designed across the UK. I've been in many parts of the UK and that's just how it's been for a long, long time but that doesn't make it right.

From my perspective, moving forwards, I'm very focused on the investment programme which is significant, to be rolled out across Devon and Cornwall, linked with our treatment works and our compliance there but also specifically any combined sewer overflows that spill. I don't specifically know exactly where you are in North Devon so it would be helpful, afterwards, if I could understand that because that would let me understand about links to investment that we're doing there with the team. So that would be super helpful for me to understand that and the history, actually, to that part of the coastline because that might be more targeted for me to give you a better answer beyond this session.

We are measured on bathing water compliance. We have been 100% on bathing water compliance during that window of the year, but I recognise there are unplanned events that are not tenable at all. We're working very hard with the team to remove those unplanned events but equally working to invest and reduce the spills as well. So I think from that perspective, I'll happily give you more information offline.

We have a website now that hopefully demonstrates where it should be safe to swim through our Water Fit Live, so that's an element and a tool that maybe we need to advertise and publicise a lot further. But rest assured, I'm now in this role to absolutely follow through on operational excellence and our investment programme. Based on my background, I like to think that I do substantially improve the environment that I work in and I'm certainly committed to this.

Session transcript

From that perspective, I would say that the Surfers Against [Sewage] data is our data, it's not that the datasets should be any different as I understand it, so from that point of view we'll obviously pay a lot of attention to that.

If I move onto your second part to what you'd said, we work very hard to deal with all spills and all treatment compliance. There is definitely work that needs to be done on treatment compliance, I'm not sitting here saying we're in a good space; myself and the team understand what we have to do to be better at that and that's part of the reason why I'm sitting here, so hopefully I will be able to improve that for you and the rest of the customers in Devon and Cornwall going forwards. And I do recognise that the size of that challenge and what is on my shoulders to really deliver on so you have my assurance that I'll be working around the clock to make sure it's much better for you and others.

If I move onto Community Member 3, you've given me a number of elements there around the bill increase and what you see for that bill increase. We do have to improve our leakage in South West. Myself coming in, I can see that we are probably behind where we should be in terms of our leakage position and what comes with that is probably a better structure, a better system and processes and, more importantly, execution of how we actually repair leaks. And that is leaks that are raised by you as a customer or leaks that are raised by our technicians that are out there, around the clock, so we do need to get better at that.

I am bringing in people that I trust that can deliver in that space and that has started since I've been in post so we will definitely improve in those areas to hopefully improve the trust in what we do.

I can't comment on *Dirty Business* or those elements. For me, that's a docudrama that we're not going to comment on here but I think we weren't given the opportunity to respond to the facts or the information that was in that docudrama so it's not for me to sit here and comment and challenge that in this session.

But I understand what you're saying about leakage and the patch repairs, there's different ways we do that. There's some leaks that suit the patch repair, there's some leaks that require a new piece of pipe, there's some sections of water main that have burst six or seven times therefore we will definitely replace it and we are on with that with 460 kilometres of water mains to replace across the entire group and that will split into well over 250 kilometres for the South West. So, we are on with where we think there's weaknesses within the system.

Probably what we need to get better at, back to your point, Community Member 2 and Community Member 3, we need to get better at letting you know what we are doing in investment. I recognise that there's more to do in that space, so we are going to be a lot more prominent by area, by community; what does that mean for you and how can we hopefully restore trust in getting you back into what you've enjoyed in the past, so we need to work hard on that.

I think moving to Community Member 5, the Brixham incident. I previously was CEO of Affinity Water. I was watching this incident very closely and trying to understand, I guess, what had happened there. I think it's well documented through the legal process, we've obviously been prosecuted for £1.8m by the legal system. We fully respect the outcome, the Drinking Water Inspectorate's findings, and we unreservedly apologise for the disruption that was caused to that community.

Session transcript

From my perspective, I would like to think I come from a track record where I've been pretty good in this space. We have learned a lot from that and actually the industry has as well, in terms of that air valve that was damaged and how we could be better at inspections and maintenance and how we keep an eye on those critical assets across the entire water network. It's been a lesson learned from the industry as well; it's been applied across the rest of England and Wales, in terms of the lessons learned from Brixham.

But that doesn't solve, I guess, the frustration and the disruption that you had seen at that time so I can only apologise again to you and anybody listening from that area. It's not where we want to be.

I recognise there's a number of high-profile incidents that does remove trust from the customers and key stakeholders potentially within the Devon and Cornwall area and particularly you, Community Member 2, where it has absolutely affected you personally.

I'm in the space of I can only be credible if I'm delivering for my customers and improving the environment and that comes with delivering on the targets and delivering those in a timely fashion, back to some of the points made around leakage and other aspects. That's why I'm here, I'm very passionate about the industry. I'm second generation, so my father was in this industry for 42 years and has lived and breathed it. I'm here to make a difference and that only comes with results. So hopefully over time, you will see that happen with the people that ... I believe can make a difference when I bring people in that I can trust to really deliver. But we have some fantastic people here that you need to recognise are working around the clock, on the frontline but that comes with better direction and better decision making from me.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Keith. I think the panellists, like all customers, like all householders, understand that an awful lot needs to be done and that you have a delivery plan but I think there are two issues: one is there have just been so many issues that connect together and that's why the trust is so low. Do you and your Executive team and your Board, do you really understand and acknowledge the destruction of the trust that your consumers and customers have in your company?

Keith Haslett: We recognise that the high-profile incidents and the aspects that you see across different forms of media, it definitely erodes trust, particularly if they are unplanned events where we should be doing better. I think we are highly regulated and we are clearly, when it's required, we have to work with the regulators and you've seen some of that obviously play out in the legal system and for that, I absolutely get it and so does the Board.

But I think what we need to do a lot better is actually let you all understand all the really good stuff that is happening that you don't hear about, unfortunately. We have some of the best upstream catchment thinking and application of solutions in the country to make our environment better, we're restoring rivers, we are doing all of those aspects.

CCW Chair: Keith, those are all great, positive news but the big issue is again, your customers and these panellists understand that things go wrong and it's about visible fixing and it's about what happens when things go wrong. I think that's what we want to hear more about so I'm going to stop here but thank you for that response and I'm going to now pause and hand the baton back to Joe who will manage the next stage of the discussion in terms of detecting and bringing to the fore our panellists' reactions to what you've just said.

TMcK Facilitator: I suppose just to get us started in terms of how this part of the session will work, what we want to focus on here is your reaction to what you've heard, what Keith has told you in answer to the question that you posed.

Session transcript

We're not looking for new questions, we're not looking to understand what other things you want to ask; we want to understand what you want actioned, what do you want to see happen, ultimately? It's often easier to ask questions that lead to these actions so all I'd ask you to do is try and rephrase it as you are asking it.

We want to know what you felt about the answer as well. What was clear? What was concrete? What, if anything, felt vague, felt uncertain? What's missing? And again, we want to know what do you as customers want to happen? I'll open up to discussion on that point, Community Member 4, I can bring you in at this point, if you still want to speak based on what I've just said?

Community Member 4: Yes, I'll try and keep it brief. We had seven burst mains last year in the area where I live. There are only 10 houses here and we have lead pipe. No-one's ever told us that if you get five, six, seven leaks, "We will look at replacing your pipes." A wider point, I think we all hear what you're saying, Keith, but there are thousands, hundreds of thousands of South West [Water] customers who are really, really, frustrated and angry and disappointed.

Just before today's meeting, I went on Facebook and I saw an article about sewage being dumped as a result of a mains burst at St. Mawes two days ago and tons of raw sewage went into the harbour at St. Mawes. Someone put a comment saying, "It's okay, they'll get a massive fine that we end up paying for with higher bills, to protect their shareholders. Basically, they poison then rob us." That's the kind of trust out there.

TMcK Facilitator: To bring you back to that point around creating an action off this, the point of this session is we want a few actions that you guys want to see. What do you want? If we were to write it in a sentence, what is the action?

Community Member 4: I think every time there's sewage dumped in water, there should be a fine or a foregoance of profits by the company. A donation to local companies, for example.

TMcK Facilitator: I want to bring the rest of the group in. Does anybody want to come in on those points around the answer and the actions that you want to see off the back of it?

Community Member 8: Keith, you did keep referring to the fact that there have been so many high-profile incidents that you feel are the reason that South West Water customers have lost trust in South West Water. But as consumers on this call, we are saying that it's not around the high-profile incidents so much; it's about our own lived experiences and perhaps, for instance with Community Member 2, that was not a high-profile incident, it was something that she has and still is living with herself.

So I think the actions that need to be taken from that are not just apologising for the high-profile incidents or letting the customers know about the high-profile incidents and what you're doing about those high-profile incidents, what about all the customers and all those smaller incidents? People still need to be reassured that South West Water are actually going to be doing something about those incidents, whether they're high profile or not, in my opinion.

TMcK Facilitator: What does that reassurance look like? I remember on our call about a week ago, there was a lot of scepticism about just being told, "everything's fantastic," and then you look out your window and it wasn't the case. What do they do to reassure you?

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Community Member 8: I think the reassurance needs to be in the form of actually seeing whatever South West Water are saying has been done, there needs to be visual evidence that it has been done. They say seeing is believing and that is very true for I would say the vast majority of people. If South West Water are saying, "Actually, we've replaced these three pipes". Well, show us those pipes, show us the old ones, the new ones that have been put in and the team, show us what you're doing in terms of, "We've put this new piece of machinery into help with treating sewage," anything like that. Let the actual South West [Water] customers see what you're doing, don't just tell us because then it's very difficult to believe something that we've got no evidence of.

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 2, I was going to come to you and your hand just shot up?

Community Member 2: I was just going to say, as an ex-lawyer, I've done a bit of due diligence on Mr Haslett's background and I know you have got a bit of a reputation for turning things around, which is a good thing, and taking on large projects to make sure that change can be done.

But I think a lot of other people, they do as the last speaker said, need to see something and it's interesting that your own family have been in Exmouth on the beach playing around and whatever because there's just been a huge, massive South West Water investment in a huge – I remember seeing it on [BBC] *Spotlight* – a huge tank that I believe was going to sort out their sewerage spills because obviously, that's made national headlines.

It might be an idea to – I think it was mentioned at one of the things that we had – about an open day so that people could go and even talk about that and find out more about it because I've got a friend who lives in Topsham and she doesn't know anything about it and it's on her doorstep. So it's kind of like, I mean I know you can't go round and fix every broken pipe all overnight, I'm not naïve, but things like the fact that we're on 4th August and already we've had 16,500 hours' worth of sewerage up here in North Devon just from one pipe; 1.87 years' worth. I've got these facts at my fingertips because the EA, they've given them to me. I know you can't fix everything but just to be seen to be doing something and then communicating that something to us, it just makes it look like you really are taking all of this seriously and wanting to effect change.

I know it's not going to happen overnight, I'm not stupid, but I do think that people need to be seeing that there is action happening and that we're seeing that, whether we're getting invited to things. I don't suppose everybody would want to go to a sewerage plant and have a look and see a new drum in there or something, but I would because I know that that potentially would mean more storage and less things being opened and going into our rivers. I'd be interested. I just think it's something that ... we're all paying for it, I think we ought to all see it, I think we all ought to see the progress.

TMCK Facilitator: Thank you, Community Member 2, brilliant. Community Member 6?

Community Member 6: I think in an age of social media and again, I have to be honest, I don't actually know if I follow South West [Water] on any sort of social media platform so maybe I should, but do South West Water have different social media platforms covering different areas?

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You may already have this so apologies if that is the case but say like Exeter you could say, "We're aware of a spillage at blah blah blah, we apologise for this, these are the actions that we're taking to remedy this," because I feel like that would hopefully show people and especially the younger generations that are coming through, who are using social media more and more, like it's very much a lifeline, showing them that actually, South West Water have acknowledged an issue, apologised that there's been an issue and then "This is how we're going to rectify it." I don't know if we could put that in some sort of action?

I just think that way you're starting to slowly build that trust up because you're acknowledging straightaway when there's an issue and you're telling the public, "This is how we're going to deal with it," and sometimes it's that lack of knowledge for all of us when we don't know what's going on, we just think that nothing is going on and so therefore the trust is lowered, but if we know what's going on, then it might help to build that trust up.

TMCK Facilitator: I remember one of the things that was discussed, on your point there, Community Member 6, was around the general sense that there's a lack of apology; it seems to come very late, if at all and by the time it does, you guys don't really hear about it. I don't know if there's something in that or something that, I'm opening this up to the room, if there's an action around that, that you would want to see off the back of the conversation we had?

Community Member 6: Just to say when there is a problem, the first way of building that trust is to hold your hands up and say, "Yeah, we have messed up" because we know all companies, all people, all businesses are going to make mistakes and we're not asking people to be 100% perfect, but once you acknowledge that there's been an issue, that's the first thing to rebuild that trust.

TMCK Facilitator: How do you see that playing out as an action? I'll stay with you, Community Member 6. If you don't know the answer, you're fine, but obviously, you want to create something that is doable, you know, it's a thing that has ... it can be actioned, we can put some time on it and things. How do you see that working?

Community Member 6: I'm not sure if there is something around once South West Water have acknowledged that there is a leak somewhere, there's a certain timeframe in which you've got – I don't know again if this would be okay – but to let the public know and come up with your response within a certain time, as opposed to it being like a week later, "Oh, we dealt with this". People would want to know, "We've just 10 minutes ago found that there's a sewage leak here and this is our action plan to deal with it," sort of thing. Again, I'm not sure if that can be broadcast on social media because I feel like that's the one way to get information out very quickly.

TMCK Facilitator: I think it needs to go beyond that, based on the conversation we had last week as well. Social media is just one of the platforms that we wanted to see. Community Member 3, you've been waiting patiently, thank you.

Community Member 3: I don't have the technical expertise to look at a list of actions and know whether that's going to have the impact I would like to see it having, so what I would like to see is a focus on what the actions are actually achieving, so outcomes rather than just actions and regular reporting on whatever it maybe. Again, I don't have the competence to be specific on this but we all want to see a reduction in the amount of sewage going into our waterways, I would like to see regular reporting on how the actions that are being taken are actually reducing the amount of sewage going into our waterways. You can have 1,000 actions that produce minimal effect, you can have a few actions that produce a lot of effect. So it's the effect that I'm interested in rather than the action.

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TMcK Facilitator: Who do you want to see report that? I go back to the conversation, it's about trust ultimately and the conversation last week was that there isn't trust in what is being said, at a lot of levels. So, who would you trust to deliver that, the information around what has been achieved?

Community Member 3: If I could see that the situation was actually improving, year on year, then my trust would start to edge up. As to who should be reporting that, I guess somebody independent, but again I don't know enough about the regulatory process to know who that is at the moment.

TMcK Facilitator: But somebody that's not the company?

Community Member 3: Yeah, if it's somebody that people can see is independent and you can see the situation is improving, that will impact on trust in South West Water.

TMcK Facilitator: So some action around independent verification.

CCW Chair: Can I just put in a big plea for customer friendly, in plain English language and not lots of technical jargon? I told you I'd have a go at that but it's really important to me.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 5?

Community Member 5: My background is working in Government and we take a user-centred approach, it's kind of behind the scenes, and I think this is what's missing when incidents happen is you should get an independent company who do user research or speak to customers affected, get their views on what went well, what didn't go well and then have someone who will say, "This is what customers' feedback is on how badly or how good it was, this is the action points we should take for every incident," and then publish that to customers.

I think having a user-centred approach – you're using customers' data, you're using different datapoints – would definitely help build that trust and it would have to be independent because obviously, if it was done by South West Water, no-one would trust it. But I definitely think that was missing in Brixham.

No-one once has asked me my opinion on it, what went well, what didn't go well and it would be great if they got that customer data, learned from it and then told customers, "This is what we learned from our research, this is what should be improved and we'll make sure we will never do that again", I think that's the key thing that I found is you don't take a user-centred approach at all once incidents have happened. You just take the fine, apologise and then put people's bills up.

TMcK Facilitator: So ultimately, just speaking to customers independently.

Community Member 5: But having someone to analyse that data so that you can learn from it. Companies fail but it's how you learn and progress with stuff, I think is missing.

TMcK Facilitator: We're going to look at some of the actions that you have told us about.

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CCW Chair: Before you do that, can I just put in something? I think that if you look at major FMCG retailers, many of them will have a non-executive Director who is responsible for sustainability or ESG and you have Dorothy Burwell on your Pennon Board for that, she's the Chair of your ESG group. Do you have trust in there? Is that something that is discussed regularly? Is that something that that group should be monitoring hands-on and be part of this sort of event? Do you have an area of responsibility for all of this?

ESG is just "Environment, Sustainability and Governance" and it's a stock exchange, financial world for environment and looking after customers and being aware of all the things that impact on your business and that you should look out under sustainability. I'm really just checking to see if your culture within your organisation is looking at trust and customers.

Keith Haslett: Do you want me to respond at this point, Alison?

CCW Chair: Could you do that after we've had a look at the actions? Because then there is a slot for you to respond to it, so maybe think about it.

TMcK Facilitator: Does anyone have anything else? We're going to go through some of the actions that we've written down, you'll have an opportunity to see more as we do this. Let me share the screen with what we've got so far. As I say, if you want to add things to this as we read through them, please do. We'll work through these and then give Keith the opportunity to come back on the things that have been said.

I'm going to read these out as we're going through – so my colleagues have been listing the kind of things that we talked about – if anyone wants to stop me and talk about one in particular, please do. If not, we'll get to the end and then you'll see stuff moving, it's very much work in progress as we go.

So, [A] we want South West Water to inform and reassure customers about all incidents, not just the high-profile ones, provide visual evidence that what South West Water is saying has been done, has actually been done.

[B] Hold an open day so that customers can visit and learn more about the company's infrastructure investments; people need to see that there's action happening.

[C] Use social media platforms to alert customers of issues, apologise and explain what is being done to fix it. I suppose the caveat to that would be that it also needs to be beyond social media, as we discussed in the last session.

[D] Focus on outcomes and provide regular reporting on progress and how actions taken are actually reducing the amount of sewage going into waterways.

I suppose this is D.2 but [E] reporting should be done by someone who's independent from the company, doing so in plain English so that customers can understand easily.

[F] Every time there is sewage dumped into the sea or river, South West Water should receive a fine or forego profits by the company, with the money going to local organisations. I know there's probably some regulatory stuff in there, Alison, that makes that a wee bit tricky potentially but there's maybe something in there that we can look to do or look to re-work.

[G] When there is a problem, hold your hands up and acknowledge that there's been an issue, let the public know about it within a certain timeframe, for example, the leak and then show customers the action plan to remedy the problem, how long it will take, etc.

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Finally, [H] have a user-centred approach around gaining customer feedback, independently gathered and analysed to get useful learnings from any issues that occur.

Does anyone want to come in on any of these? From my point of view, it's a good list, numbers wise. Is there anything more that you want them to do? We obviously spoke at length last week and there were a lot of things you said and if you feel there's anything missing here, please let us know.

Community Member 7: There was just one thing that I wanted to add, which I think is missing from this, is accountability. So how are South West Water going to be held accountable for doing these things and for hitting these targets? Are they going to be linked to bonuses? Are there going to be any promises around not raising prices until visible improvements have been made?

TMcK Facilitator: So, a commitment to not increasing prices until things are better^[1], ultimately?

Community Member 7: Potentially, yeah. That for me is something that would really prove to me that they were serious and dedicated to trying to rebuild trust.

TMcK Facilitator: Who would you trust to monitor that? If South West Water said to you, "Things are good now so your bill's going up," that's probably not the conversation but who do you ultimately believe?

Community Member 7: Again, I think it would be something that would have to be independently monitored and assessed by an independent body.

TMcK Facilitator: Anybody else want to add anything?

Community Member 4: Just coming back to point F^[2] about sewage being dumped. As you said, there may be some regulatory penalties anyway but I think if trust is going to really improve, South West Water voluntarily donating to local causes when there's a dumpage in their area, I think that would really increase people's trust and it's a very tangible and visible thing as well.

TMcK Facilitator: Are we happy with this list? Is there anything missing? This is your session, I don't want to miss anything that's important for you. Okay, brilliant, Alison, I'll go back to you, please.

CCW Chair: Thank you. Keith, before we close this question, this is really the spot where you can respond on behalf of South West Water, to respond to what customers have said here and to confirm what you're prepared to commit to. I think, in particular, we'd like to be clear about what you accept responsibility for and what you will do to support and involve those affected and what you will personally lead in terms of rebuilding trust. And if there are things that you can't commit to tonight, please let us know. What things do you need to go and consider? Who's going to take it forward and when we could expect a firm response? And that accordingly, things will be recorded transparently as part of this session. The baton is yours, Keith.

1. Added as Action Point I

2. Action Point F: Every time there is sewage dumped in the sea/river, SWW receive a fine or should forego profits by the company with the money going to local organisations (e.g., as a donation)

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Keith Haslett: Alison, if it's okay, I might actually just go through this list and give you hopefully a response on each of these in a succinct way, if I can, for now and then we can wrap up with a wider piece, if that's okay?

With the first one, every incident, particularly where it's involving water, we do publicise that on our website. Where we do have customer details, particularly if it's interruption to supply or a water quality issue, we will notify customers through text message, through email where we have the customer details, we will definitely do that, particularly for priority service customers registered with us.

Of course, with wastewater and any particular incidents, we do have also other ways and channels of publicising that with customers, but I recognise if there's more we can do to localise that to communities then we'll certainly take that away as an action today. We have significant infrastructure going in the ground: Sidmouth, Exmouth, Dawlish has just had significant investment and we'll start to clearly move around different parts of the coastline. So, from a wastewater point of view, there will potentially be opportunities where we can try and facilitate that where we can, in a construction site.

But equally, if there's opportunities to introduce you to a water treatment works or a wastewater works where we can, we'll certainly look at a way where we can try and facilitate that. I'm more than happy to do that because it will showcase the amount of work going on today and with the investment.

On the social media platforms, we do a lot of that; are we doing it well enough? Maybe that's the question I need to take away and take an action on. So where we do get it wrong, we do try and apologise, we would hope, if we don't then I'll certainly pick that up with the team that will hopefully be listening to this call tonight.

In terms of outcomes, providing regular reporting, we are highly regulated as you would expect, both by Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Environment Agency and of course, working with CCW. We have to report quarterly on our performance on delivery of commitments, and we have to absolutely take account of ourselves where we're delayed or whether there's any issues in that delivery so I would like to think that we are certainly in that space.

We have, in Year 1, reduced our pollutions by around a third. That was based in our annual report. We've actually – a larger sewer network then was adopted or approved previously with our regulators. That has also helped the overall stats but doesn't make it better in terms of cracking on with spill reduction.

TMcK Facilitator: Just on that point, those measures are taken by you. Are they verified by someone else or is that just an internal measure?

Keith Haslett: They're very much from our live event duration monitors, that's all clearly wrapped up with our regulators independently in terms of submissions and I'm probably going to show a bit of a theme here as I go through, just to give assurance, you have regulators that are very thorough and very much involved in what we do ...

CCW Chair: Keith, you're talking to customers here. I think we all recognise that it's a highly regulated sector. There's a difference between reporting to regulators and reporting back to customers and I think what we heard a little bit earlier is that customers want to know more, and in their language and in their terms and their experience. And whilst it's great that you're reporting quarterly to regulators, that's not the same as reporting to customers.

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Keith Haslett: I recognise that, Alison. I guess I'm just trying to give you a balance between how we interact with customers and what we shall take away, but also just to demonstrate that there are people out there that are very close to what we do. From that perspective, if the reporting isn't in plain English, then maybe we need to look at a way to give you those stats in a more customer friendly way.

In terms of Point F^[3], where we do have an incident that involves the environment, there are very clear guidelines around us self-reporting that pollution; we are measured on that. We have, clearly, classifications where if it's at a point where it's an extreme pollution incident, then clearly we will be held to account for that and there are fines linked with that, both with Ofwat and potentially with the Environment Agency so we do have to clearly adhere to that and follow their guidelines. So to the point made earlier, that does happen. To the harbour incident that you've mentioned, clearly that's very recent and that will be assessed accordingly by the Environment Agency.

I think where we believe there is a problem, we will hold our hands up. We've clearly apologised for a number of incidents, I appreciate that may be high profile; the more localised or personal ones maybe, if there's more we need to do there then we'll certainly have a look at that, so I do recognise that.

I think wider, we recognise that we need to do more around how we interact with customers and ...

Community Member 4: I'm really sorry to interrupt here, you talked about "fined by the regulator", can you not give any commitment about putting your hand in your pocket yourself, as a company, to say, "Yes, we've got it wrong, we know we are obliged to pay these fines but this is what we will do for this community to put something right ourselves." Something voluntary. Can you not commit to that?

Keith Haslett: What I would respond to you there is that we do also have environmental undertakings where we work with other partnerships where we try and come up with potential, I guess, options or solutions that does give back to the environment where we have done something wrong, so we do try and do that as well.

But we are heavily punished, and rightly so, where we get it wrong, so we do try and work with different trusts, etc., where we try and do more for the environment in particular where it's been affected, so that is the case.

From a customer point of view, what I was going to say is that we are upgrading our customer system at the minute for South West [Water], we're about to go live with that hopefully at the end of September. What should hopefully flow in the back of that is making your interaction with us hopefully much easier, with better channel of choice, through home moves, etc., but also down the line, we would hope to have more ways of communicating with you through digital apps and other aspects that go beyond social media and our website. That's something we're very much talking about at the minute as the next phase and how we can try and improve that experience for you as customers.

Ultimately, we're funded in a five-year period to deliver very clear outcomes for both water and wastewater and that comes with a requirement in terms of customer bills to basically get those increases in those improvements.

3. Action Point F: Every time there is sewage dumped in the sea/river, SWW receive a fine or should forego profits by the company with the money going to local organisations (e.g., as a donation)

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What I would say is on those performance commitments, particularly the ones we've talked about tonight around pollution leakage, burst mains, etc. We do have targets that we have to hit based on that funding model and if we don't hit those targets, then clearly there's a regulatory mechanism that deals with that.

So, it is very open and transparent in that way. What I would say is we have to be held to account for those improvements in that five-year period and then we obviously review with yourselves as customers, what's important for the next five-year period and we go through that process to reset targets and deliver going forward. So, there is very much linkage to the investment we've been given and absolutely what we have to try and deliver for you as customers and the environment.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Keith. I would just like to throw the session open again back to our customers to say, does this feel reasonable? Does it feel proportionate? What are your feelings about what we've just heard?

Community Member 4: I don't want to keep flogging a dead horse, but I think, Keith, you've missed a chance here to show trust. What you've essentially said is, "We will do what we have to do but we will not voluntarily give up some cash, make some donations to show how really serious we are," so for me personally speaking, you've missed a chance and you've not gained any trust from me as a customer, as a bill payer.

Community Member 8: Yeah, absolutely agree with the previous speaker. I've just listened to everything you've said, Keith, and honestly, I was thinking, "What are you actually committing here to then?", because I thought that's what this was: "Here are the several points that we would like you to make that commitment to and if you can't do it tonight, let us know why you can't do that tonight." And yet I haven't actually heard many of these points being confirmed at all.

Community Member 1: I feel like there is a lot of talk about punishment but it's all how South West Water gets punished, like monetary, but actually it's the consumer that's always punished at the end. They get the sewage in the water, they can't use the water, it rolls onto the beaches, you can't use the beach and then all of this kind of talk about infrastructure, improving the customer service, etc, but in the end it is the consumer that still gets punished because they have to pay for it. So, everything that's wrong with South West Water, the punishment is actually just passed on, really, to the consumer because they are the ones that are personally affected, whereas the company might lose a bit of money, but the bosses and whatnot are still getting their bonuses. So, I don't think really – no disrespect, Keith – I don't think you really get it.

TMcK Facilitator: Tell me the action, what do you want to see off what you've just said?

Community Member 1: I agree with Community Member 4, that there should be more voluntary money coming saying, "Hang on, you've had a big sewage spill there, your whole beach has got sewage on it now," what are you going to do for the community? There's small businesses along the estuary that would have had that sewage dumped right outside them; what are you going to do for them? There's a lot the community could probably do with if you helped them out. Again, these things, like you said, it seems to be, "this is the way it's been done for years, this is the way sewage has got disposed of," so now you need to find a way of, if you can't immediately fix all of that, how can you kind of try and help out with the localised problems?

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So really, it has to be money that is not given away just because you've been fined, it has to be more willingness to come from yourselves saying, "We do care about the environment or the locals," or "This is what we're going to give, regardless of whether we're fined or not." I don't think it should just be about regulation.

CCW Chair: I'm just going to say, there is quite clearly something that needs to be invested in reframing [points] F^[4] and G^[5], I think, and I would recommend that we take that offline through Taylor McKenzie and come back to both the panel and to Keith, because I'm very conscious of time and we're using a lot of people's evening and we haven't yet started our next and last question, which I would really like to have a go at.

Keith, thank you for going through each of them in turn. I'm slightly worried that it's an iteration of things that are already happening rather than things that need to change and, in a sense, I think your customers are looking to hear more about visible fixing and more about what happens when things go wrong and it's really just about an acknowledgement that things are not right and putting a hand up and then sorting things out, as we've heard earlier.

So, I'm going to say for the record, we've now agreed the actions as far as we can, with the exception of [points] F and G^[6], which we will revisit and come back round to everybody offline.

I am going to ask that we move onto our second question now and the context for this question is going to be provided by Community Member 10, Community Member 1 and Community Member 4. Community Member 4 will then ask the question to the company. I would really like to pass the baton to Community Member 10, so that she can share her story, please.

Community Member 10: Thanks, Alison. Hi, Keith. So there's an infamous smell in my local area of Plympton in Plymouth, known as the "Plympton Pong". This is a smell that's been notorious to locals for as long as I can remember and I'm 53. This smell has also made national headlines over the years and also a shameful mention on the nationwide BBC programme, *Have I Got News For You?*

It's an embarrassment to local residents and there are certainly areas of Plympton that I wouldn't live in because of it and it must have an impact on house prices. It must also seep through the closed car windows of hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the country who travel to Cornwall via the A38 every year, just as it seeps into my own car on the way to work every day.

I moved away from Plympton for 25 years and came back 8 years ago and the smell has not remotely improved in all that time, but it has in fact become noticeably worse since the addition of 6,000 new homes at the newly built town of Sherford, which now also pumps all of its waste into our already overstretched local sewage works in Plympton. The stench is unbearable all year round. It can worsen depending on the wind direction and on hot summer days like we've had recently and it's so much worse generally with the addition of Sherford waste.

4. Action Point F: Every time there is sewage dumped in the sea/river, SWW receive a fine or should forego profits by the company with the money going to local organisations (e.g., as a donation)

5. Action Point G: When there is a problem, hold your hands up and acknowledge there has been an issue. Certain timeframe to let the public know that there has been, for example, a leak and then show customers the action plan to remedy the problem

6. As above

Session transcript

Additional sewage infrastructure has not been put in place for the addition of an entire new town and the excuse that wastewater work needs to be near an estuary, presumably for sewage dumping which is also notorious in the area, but surely there are hundreds of towns across the country that aren't near an estuary?

Our local councillor has campaigned for over 20 years about this disgusting odour. There's absolutely no sign of any improvement and I simply smell a lack of any effective action from South West Water. Thank you.

CCW Chair: Thank you very much, Community Member 10. Now, if I can pass to Community Member 1.

Community Member 1: Hi, Keith. So over the winter and autumn, we do get a lot of rain and obviously we're getting all the sewage overflowing to the sea. It's very visible, very close to us. You can see the big brown mass floating along the bay, basically. And when the tide, when it comes in and when the tide goes out, we are often left with a really brown, smelly foam on the beach. Some of it may be natural but a lot of it is smelly and it does come from the sewage. And recently, we've had posters come up from South West Water saying it's algae, it's a natural thing, it may be brown, it may be smelly. But we all know it's sewage because when there's sewage out there, it is going to roll onto your beach; we are taking that now off the beach into our homes. And I just don't think they should be making claims like that. You shouldn't make claims like that, that it is actually safe and it's natural when actually it is sewage. And we're on that beach every day, walking around in it, and it's just awful.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 1. Now if I can pass to Community Member 4 and would you please articulate the question for Keith?

Community Member 4: I think as we've heard, these experiences that we've talked about are why customers are no longer reassured by lists of projects, investment figures or actions the company says have been completed. What matters is whether pollution visibly reduces, whether services become more reliable and communities see lasting local change.

We know South West Water has targets for environmental pollution, drinking water quality and service reliability. So, the first part of the question is how will you turn these targets into visible, lasting local improvements and prove that rebuilding trust is changing how the company operates, rather than becoming a set of, I don't want to say this, but seemingly empty promises while business continues as usual?

The final part of the question, if outcomes or deadlines are missed, how will this be reported openly? Who will be held accountable and as the CEO, what consequences are you prepared to put in place for senior leadership, including yourself, to show customers that these commitments carry real weight and they're not just words? Thank you.

CCW Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Community Member 4. Again, I'm asking, Keith, if you would respond and if you could focus again on things that customers will actually see and experience rather than just projects or investments or activity. As several members have said, they're concerned about outcomes rather than just inputs.

To the rest of the panel, if you could just listen carefully and note anything that feels clear, unclear, too broad or is missing. Keith, the floor is yours.

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Keith Haslett: I think clearly there's a couple of specific examples there that I will need to follow up on, I don't have that to hand here today. I know certainly in Plymouth, we will be investing a significant amount of money into that area, particularly with what we would call Plymouth Central, and we're talking at this point £50 million and beyond that for 2035, a significant amount more than that, so that is definitely on its way.

I think what I've heard tonight is how do we better communicate the investment programme and how that distils down into the different geographic areas and communities and towns? And I think that's something we need to have a real think about how we do that. These are wastewater examples. We have put a lot of effort into improving our performance, certainly in Year 1 and we'll continue with that going forward from an operations perspective and we probably need to make clear how we go about doing that and what we're doing day to day with the operational teams.

I know that the Wastewater Director's listening tonight so he's certainly going to be taking on board how we try and translate that into yourselves and information for customers and communities, so we'll have to try and do that.

We try and clearly get across, through different formats, some of the investment that we're making. We've tried to demonstrate just the size and scale of some of that with some of the posts we've tried to do through social media. But for me, I think I've heard loud and clear tonight that for each of you, you need a better understanding of exactly what we're up to day to day.

To the point made earlier, where we do get it wrong, we try and – I call it undertakings – but we try and do things for that local community where we can in terms of rectifying the issue that's happened. But look, I'll certainly take away the points made. I think you've made two very valid points tonight about how we try and make it more visible on investment and the actions taken and how we try and deliver on those promises.

Again, I would say to you, it's highly visible where we are late on any of those commitments. You can see that through public documents through the Ofwat portal, that's very clear on the investment. But if I need to try and show that from us to you rather than ...

CCW Chair: Can I just stop you, Keith? I don't think customers are going to look at Ofwat portal.

Keith Haslett: I was just going to go on, Alison, to say that if that's clearly not evident to you, then we need to work out a way to translate that into something that's meaningful for you, which is what I was about to say. I think that's what we'll have a look at so that we're showcasing that we are on track with the delivery programme that we need to do.

Now I have to say, as I'm new into the role, what I am looking at is where we can try and bring forward some of those schemes from Year 4 and 5, which is '29, 2030, where I think we can get hopefully some benefits and quick wins for customers and the environment in that space. I will absolutely look at that as a commitment from me to you. And equally, on the water side, where we can try and be more resilient and try and have enhanced service for customers, equally I will be looking at that with our water mains replacement programme.

We've talked a broad range of elements tonight but ultimately, it comes down to just better communication on our actions and I think I need to work out a way to do that better.

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CCW Chair: I'm sorry, I think it's a bit more than just better communication on actions. There is a big culture change about being accountable for these things and understanding where customers are coming from, how they're living it. How many of your executive team and your senior management team actually live in South West Water catchment areas? How many of them actually experience Marsh Barton Sewage Works smell? How many of them actually go and take their family and swim – or not swim – when they plan to, in that particular beach?

You've got people on holiday down there in St. Mawes now who will not be able to deliver to their families what they want to do down on Portreath Beach, etc., so I think there's a much, it's about visible fixing, it's being much more open. I shouldn't be actually giving you the solutions, this is about a culture shift and being so much more open about what you need to do, how you're going to do it and telling customers about it. I know you have to tell the regulators by your licensing, but customers pay your bills, they pay your wages.

Keith Haslett: Alison, I absolutely take on board all those points. Maybe I've not translated that into what I'm trying to say in terms of communicating to customers. Clearly, we've a high proportion of our staff live in the area. There are second generation, third generation family members working in this business that love the world they live in and they're very passionate about making these improvements and hopefully under my leadership and direction, we will see hopefully a step change in how we go about doing that.

I recognise the points you've made; I would suggest we have a lot of people that live and breathe the environment in Devon and Cornwall outside their working hours as well as in their working hours, so I don't think that's ... I think we need to recognise that.

CCW Chair: I need to hand back to Joe. Thank you for that response, Keith. I'm going to hand back to Joe because we now need to use this next section to really think about how our panellists have responded to that and what we believe you should be taking on in terms of commitments to try and rebuild trust, this forward look. Joe, over to you.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you very much. Folks, I'll just hand straight over to you. I want to understand a bit more about how you felt about the answer that was given there. As I said with the first question, we want to build towards actions based off the question that you asked. Does anybody want to jump in or shall I put somebody on the spot? Community Member 10, you're going to go first, thank you.

Community Member 10: Thank you for your responses there, Keith. I think what we also need to kind of remember is that we all need water and we all don't have a choice in who we have as a water provider. So obviously, I think if we did, I think your job might be a little bit more precarious than it is at the moment, to be honest. But I think going forward, picking up on Community Member 5's point that she made earlier about being more customer centric instead of focusing more on service level agreements, it should be focusing more on experience level agreements and taking into account more about customers. I don't think I've ever seen a survey asking my opinion about anything or, apart from this forum, ever had the opportunity to express any feelings about South West Water, so I think that kind of thing going forward would definitely be a plus and show that you do actually, you are interested in customer experience and what is happening.

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Community Member 4: A couple of things. I think like Community Member 10 said, we're not really customers because we don't have any choice and you rightly, from your point of view, refer to it as a business but it's much more than that to us. Leaving all that to one side, I think what's clear is how low levels of trust are in this region and what I think you should look at is, as a target, compare yourselves as a company to other water companies across the country and have a target thereby within 24 months, 36 months, you'll have the highest ranking customer score in the whole water sector in the UK. That's something I think you should go for and something you should publish, so that we can all have a look at that and see how you get on or not.

TMCK Facilitator: Does anybody else want to come in on this point? It's your question and we want to make sure we create some actions off the back of this that reflect what you want to happen. I want to give you the opportunity to tell Keith what you want, that's why we're here at the end of the day. Community Member 6?

Community Member 6: I don't want to pose a question but I just wondered whether South West Water has volunteer days? I know some big companies give their employees one or two volunteer days a year and I'm not sure what you guys do, but with some of the issues that have been raised, whether some of those volunteer days could be spent in the local areas, like actually talking to people and gathering what the concerns are and then litter picking or whatever it might be within the area that the customers have had concerns, so there's like a visible presence. Because again, that would really help public trust, to actually see people in high vis, South West Water to say, "There's been an issue here and this is how we're addressing it."

You only really see South West Water employees when they come and do the meter readings on your water meter or if you call them out for an issue. I know it's like a little bit different, it's not like the police when there's an issue, you can visibly be present but I'm wondering if that might be another way of trying to increase public trust, to show that there's boots on the ground and we are actually doing things?

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 5, over to you.

Community Member 5: To add to what was just said, last month we had this scheme where we live with South West Water and a guy from South West Water came to our house, looked for leaks in the property, checked how good we were at using water, etc., and we found it really useful. Obviously, we didn't have leaks so it didn't affect us but if someone did have a leak in the house, it will help you save money and it gave more of a presence to South West Water.

So I think if they could do more schemes like that, that show that they want to help customers save money, they're there to help them, it's not just all about water quality, I think improving their presence that way can also help. We had no idea about this service until South West Water called us and the guy who turned up was really good and he said we were really efficient with our water and gave us all these tips and it was really useful, so I don't know if they could do more schemes like that because it will help improve trust maybe in them and also their presence as well.

TMCK Facilitator: Community Member 2, you've been quiet for a minute or so. I don't know if you want to add anything to this part of the conversation?

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Community Member 2: Not really because I don't know ... I'm slightly in a cul-de-sac with all of it really, I just don't know ... I don't have any trust, this is the problem, and I kind of don't know how it's ever going to get back and I don't know if that's important, just one middle-aged housewife stressing about not being able to get into the sea. I don't know if it's important enough, really. It comes to something though when as a family, you're ending up thinking, "Shall we move to Shropshire?" because I don't need to be by the sea anymore. It's just quite sad all of it, really. I don't know what the answer is.

And also I don't know what the answer is because we're talking about a publicly listed company and it's all about profit at the end of the day and it's a utility that we can't live without, we have to have water, we have to drink, and so I don't know whether it's a passion project of Mr Haslett's or whether it's a job or whether it's something he wants to change or whether it's going to be gone in five years and we're still going to be having this conversation in five years. I just don't know. I don't know what they want to do to change it, I don't know.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Community Member 2. One of the parts in the question was around, "What consequences are you prepared to put in place for senior leadership to show customers that these commitments carry real weight?" I want you to have a little think about what you would want those to be as customers and then I'm going to ask you about them.

Community Member 8: I think when you're asking people, "Tell us, come on everybody, what do you want?" and there's kind of a silence; I hate to say but I think we're all kind of sharing Community Member 2's point here; none of us have got trust in South West Water. If we did, we wouldn't be in this panel. And Community Member 2 just said, "Is it important? One housewife can't get in the sea?" Well yes, it should be to South West Water. Every single person that uses South West Water should be important to them.

However, I don't know that any of us really believe that we are that important and it all feels a bit – I'm sorry, Keith, to say this, but it does feel and possibly only from my point of view, maybe – but it does kind of feel a bit lip service to this. Is anything going to change? I don't know, it's sort of like great, I can tell you the action points that I would love to see, one of those being: how about no bonuses for any of the senior staff or any staff until things are improved? I only found this out last week that it's not actually legal to pay bonuses at all. They are couched as "meeting targets". What targets? I have no idea. How about maybe doing something about that to improve trust? But I can't honestly say that I believe that that would be an action point that would ever be adhered to.

TMcK Facilitator: How would you want that to work? I know you're not an expert in this kind of thing but simply put, the repercussions of not hitting the targets, what would that be?

Community Member 8: I would want the repercussions for not hitting targets – or until all targets are hit actually, not just not hitting a target – until all the targets are hit and they, South West Water, have achieved a certain satisfaction score with their customers through a panel like this; they have raised trust to an acceptable level to where they're not in special measures, which obviously they are at the moment, until that time, all of the senior – I don't know what they're called – the senior leaders of the company, pledge that they won't take any bonuses or whatever they call them because bonuses are not supposed to be paid – but let's be honest, we all know they're bonuses – and pledge, "No, I'm not going to take any bonuses until this level that we've reached in this panel of trust has been reached."

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Community Member 7: I actually had my hand up to say more or less what Community Member 8 was just saying with regards to the bonuses, that is absolutely what I would like to see as well. I think the point here is all of us have such low trust at this point and feel so undervalued that we need to see a real statement made in order for that to change and I think something like that would feel like a real statement.

I also just want to say as well, what Community Member 2 was saying about she's just one person and does it matter and do they care? Well, Community Member 2, you're not just one person and I think that's the whole point here. We're all feeling, albeit in different ways and from different experiences, exactly the same as you.

TMcK Facilitator: And I think that was very much the impression that I got, Community Member 2, from the conversation we had last week with the group. You're certainly not the only person experiencing and feeling like that.

Community Member 1: Just the same as Community Member 8 and Community Member 7, basically, the bonuses – I think if you're going to put your consumers' price up, you shouldn't be giving out any bonuses and that doesn't mean, "We won't do a bonus, we'll just put their salary up," it shouldn't be kind of a loophole.

I think there should be a cap on salaries, to be fair. If you're needing all this extra money to do so many things, it shouldn't always come from the consumer. There shouldn't be all these high bonuses because, like Community Member 4 said, we are stuck in this loophole of being part of a business where we don't get to choose.

Because 100% right now, if another water company came along, you'd lose most of your customers. No-one's going to stay, you'd probably lose the majority because there is no – if there's no loyalty from the water company about thinking about the consumers' needs, there's not going to be any loyalty on the other end. To be fair, we could all stop paying our bills, couldn't we? Just stop paying because if we're not getting what we need; we don't get good water, it's now affecting our surroundings, then what are we paying for? We're paying to fix South West Water's mistakes, essentially. No bonuses!

Community Member 5: I do think from what people are saying, if the public had the option to say could water companies be nationalised and be non-profit, I think the majority would say yes, it should be nationalised and non-profit. And I think South West Water know this might not happen, but there is a risk it could happen, so therefore they should be working really hard to make improvements before it does become nationalised, like the train companies, then they've lost their company. And I think if there was more of a threat from Government that that would happen, I think that would force them to take action rather than the bonuses and all that stuff. I think it needs to come from higher up because I don't think they care about customers because they know they've got the monopoly and whatever we say or whatever we do, they're still going to have the power and the company.

TMcK Facilitator: We're short on time so I want to share what we've jotted down to make sure you guys are happy with it and then we'll obviously go on from there. Alison?

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CCW Chair: Can I just come in here? I'm very conscious that we're using, Keith, your valuable time in the evening, we're using our panellists', customers' valuable time in the evening and I'm going to say it straight: I think everyone's feeling tired, underwhelmed and undervalued. So we'll hear what comes up next but I'm just going to put a plea in that perhaps you need to take all of this away – I know you're new in the role, you've had a real bloodbath of comments this evening from real people living in your company's operating area – to go away and reflect and think about this and come back to the panel and come back because this is an enormous issue, this lack of trust, it is the worst that we've seen at Consumer Council for Water.

And I just really want to make the point that no regulator is going to sanction you for lack of trust or poor trust, I think we all recognise that. But you are going to have increased scrutiny from every regulator and every politician that's got a finger in the pie where trust is declining because I think it would be viewed as an early warning sign and you could be using up an awful lot of management time and operational time fielding and dealing with an awful lot more regulator scrutiny.

So, for me, customers pay wages. This is something that you and your exec team should be held to account by your Board to increase trust, to serve your customers well and to be visible in fixing it and to be visible in saying, "We got it wrong, we're dealing with it."

Two things you said encourage me: that you're trying to bring forward investment from later on in your investment year, that's great but that puts a strain on the company. We're living with climate change, we're living with drought, we're living with all sorts of things and I don't want to get on a soapbox, I just think that this is quite a seminal evening for me as a new Board member on the Voice for Consumers and Consumer Council for Water, and I'm just so conscious that we've had some harrowing stories, we've had some persistent, long-standing stories.

This is a chance for you as a new CEO to get every skeleton out of your closet and make a difference, act differently, create a different operating board, a different executive to do things differently. That's given Taylor McKenzie a chance to bring up what we have to date but I have a feeling that we may ask you to go away and reflect upon this bit because this is the big question: how are you going to convince us that things are going to be different and that you're going to rebuild trust?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, we'll run through this and we'll give Keith some time to respond. Let me share what we've got on the screen and I'll run through it. Do feel free to jump in as I'm speaking if there's anything that you feel we've missed or not articulated correctly in our action.

The first one was [A] to send surveys to customers to gain feedback on their experience, show your interest in customer experience.

[B] Use employee volunteer days, to spend them in local affected areas, for example, litter picking. It was really about getting presence of the company within local communities, ultimately.

[C] Repercussions, until all targets have been met and South West Water achieve good customer satisfaction scores, no bonuses paid to any of its senior staff. Introduce a cap on salaries, especially considering bills are getting higher and higher for customers.

[D] was to compare yourself to other water companies in the country and to set a target to be the highest rated water company within the next 12-24 months.

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[E] was more home visit schemes where South West Water staff survey houses for leaks and offer advice on how to save water.

Really quickly from the community members, is there anything you want to add here? Is there anything we want to change? Have we missed anything? No worries. Alison, I'll hand back to you.

CCW Chair: We have some actions here, Keith, I'd be really happy to hear your response to this but I think I am going to ask you to go away and reflect, but I'd be interested in your immediate response to these.

Keith Haslett: I think you need to give me the opportunity to respond. First and foremost, I am extremely passionate about making a difference for customers and the environment, I've lived and breathed it for as long as I can remember in my household and I have to say, I'm not surprised, clearly, by all the various examples that I've heard tonight and the events and incidents that have happened in the past. But that's why I'm here, I'm deeply passionate about making a difference now for this coastline and for the customers that are within that. So please, if you can do anything tonight, please take that away, that I will be very much on that case.

We do follow-up on customer events. There's a formal way of doing that, but we also do that ourselves in the background to understand where lessons can be learned and how we can do things better, so we try and do that. We do have a Water Share Plus Panel, where there is an invite there for people to join that and provide feedback, so I am in the background with Matthew Taylor, there's one next week I believe, so there's an option there for some of the feedback that was given.

I am a very competitive individual as well; I do want to be the best in terms of league tables and the industry and what that should translate to is much better customer service and improving the environment. Certainly, from a customer service point of view, I'm very focused on how we do that and how set ourselves targets to move up that league table, which is quite low today. I would like to think from Affinity Water, I've been in a place where that was lower quartile and it's now one of the higher performing water-only companies across the sector, so hopefully I can translate that for you as customers into water and waste performance going forwards.

We do have volunteer days; we do beach cleans. Clearly, we maybe don't make enough of that in terms of how we go about that as a business and how we can maybe get communities and customers involved, if indeed they wish to do that. So I'll definitely have a look at that, I've done a few in the past and will do going forward, so happy to do that.

The water efficiency visits is a good point; we do offer that as part of our affordability package. I'm glad to hear that that has been a good experience. We offer that across a range of customers, so maybe if we can make that more prominent in our website portal and our communications, then we definitely need to do that.

There are consequences for our senior leadership team, as far as I'm aware, there was no bonus for the South West Water executives last year due to performance. I have a very high bar here. I've brought new people in, in order to try and really improve performance and translate that to you as customers, so that is in motion and certainly I've been very active in that way.

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I'm not here to comment on public ownership. I've worked in a public owned water company for about 12 years in the past. I understand the constraints around it at times but equally, we're all here to serve customers and improve the environment and we need to demonstrate how we have tried to do that over the last number of years, so I need to work out a way to translate that to you.

But the most important thing you need to take away from this is that I am here to make a huge difference; a lot of it comes at personal sacrifice to me to make that difference in this role but that's what I am definitely prepared to do for quite some time and hopefully, Community Member 2, it's a lot longer than five years, in order to make that difference for you. So I hope we're not here in five years with a different face, I would like to think it will be me and by all means I'll take account for that.

Community Member 4: Keith, can I ask in terms of being competitive, where do you aim to be in the next two years, in terms of customer satisfaction, given where you are now?

Keith Haslett: Customer satisfaction is clearly the most important measure; there's a range of aspects to it. Part of it is we need to upgrade our system, part of it is we need to improve our operational service on the field and part of it is sentiment and experience with you. Ideally, this is a four- or five-year project. Would I want to get to number one? Absolutely. Do I think I can get to the top six or top eight? Absolutely, that's where we're going to aim for because I'll be honest with you, it does take time to move the dial.

I've had many meetings already and there's people on this call are being held to account as to how we get there, so I want to be number one in everything we do but it takes a little bit of time to get some of those systems and processes in place, in order for it to be effective for you and your experience.

I come from an environment where we were number one in C-MeX, in Northumbrian, so I understand what it takes and the passion required from within the business. But to Alison's point earlier, that does require a bit of a shift in culture and mindset and what I expect from the employees, going forwards, in terms of customer service and our supply chain that are very prominent in helping us deliver that.

So to answer your question, clearly I want to be right at the top, where will we be in two years? Hopefully four or five places better. By the end of the AMP, hopefully better again but it does take time to get that investment in place and put the systems and processes in place.

Community Member 4: Thank you.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Keith, for that response. We've had some response back from members of the panel, but I would just like to open up, apart from Community Member 4, are there any other feelings, comments that you would like to pitch in at this point? I have a resounding "no" from everybody.

Okay, I'm really conscious it's a hot evening and everyone's tired, so I think I would like to just conclude by saying that in my view as Chair, these actions that we have up here on our screen are probably because of our lack of knowledge of the industry and because of the fact that I'm new in this sector, I don't think they're very stretching and probably, Keith, you would acknowledge that as well.

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I'm going to go back to what I said a bit earlier which is I would really like you to go back to your executive board and your senior team and reflect on these two really big questions, the reasons for the continuing loss of trust within the community and how you will convince these members of this panel, these consumers, that they can trust you.

So I would like you to go back and reflect and return with a better answer and a better plan, and I'm also going to ask CCW to go away and do the same on behalf of our panellists. I would like both parties to meet and put together a really decent plan that we could bring back to this panel and that you could in all honesty stand up and portray your commitment to these representatives of all of your customers with a serious short succinct and outcomes-based plan to rebuild trust.

And I would like members of your group board to be observers and I would like members of your executive board to be observers and to actually hear you deliver that plan and the response from these panellists, these your customers because I think we need visible and personal commitment from you and your team and I want everybody at the very top of your organisation to hear that, so that you can be sure that you've got the backing of your board to deliver what needs to be done to rebuild trust, because as I said earlier, no-one's going to give you a fine for lack of trust.

But lack of trust will be an indicator for every regulator round there to be knocking on your door, peering into everything you're doing and from my perspective, that's going to distract from actually getting the job done. But so be it. Are you willing to take up that challenge?

Keith Haslett: I'm more than happy if you want members of the board to be observers, you've got half of my exec team as observers tonight. I should say, and I probably should have said this earlier, we have completed an independent survey on trust, and we have presented that to the board in terms of the ESG committee, so they have seen that. A lot of the themes we've talked about tonight are part of the themes in that trust survey; we will do that on a regular basis and I'm more than happy to come back with some of those themes and what we will do to work on that.

CCW Chair: I'm less interested in duplicating themes, I'm interested in an outcomes, to quote Community Member 4 and Community Member 2, an outcomes-based plan. Real milestones, absolute data, absolute deadlines. Everybody knows that events, dear boy, events get in the way and a plan will always have problems when it hits reality, but at least we can see where you're going in this and above all in consumer language, please, in plain English. Do I have your commitment to go away with that?

Keith Haslett: We can definitely have a look at that, yes, for sure.

CCW Chair: Thank you. I'm not going to bother going through my closing speech because we're now 5 to 8 and I don't know about you, but I either need a glass of wine or a cup of tea, depending on your proclivities. But I would like to say, Keith, thank you to you for coming and spending your evening; thank you to your executive senior directors who are with you on this call as observers, thank you for your time; and thank you, most of all, to every single one of you amazing customers for being here and being as articulate and honest and as direct as you were last week, and for conveying your passion for trying to put this right because I think that's the one thing that your customers have got: they really want to see positive change.

On that note, I will say thank you and goodnight and have a good rest of the evening. Relax and we will back to you, for sure.

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TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, folks.

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