

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: Tuesday 22nd September 2026

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 South West Water's resulting commitments are set out on the following pages.

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?

South West Water has provided its response and set out actions. Some delivery details and timescales remain to be confirmed. CCW will monitor progress against the commitments. CCW and Taylor McKenzie Research will provide **monthly updates on what has changed and what remains outstanding**, helping community members prioritise issues to follow up at the Autumn Accountability Sessions.

Summary report

Detailing the actions that South West Water have committed to.

Q1. Addressing reasons for continuing loss of trust

Our community members want South West Water to go beyond regulatory requirements and fines, as meeting these requirements alone is not helping community members rebuild trust.

Community members would like South West Water to commit to informing customers about **all pollutions, drinking water issues and spills**, clearly explaining:

- what happened
- what is being done immediately to address it
- what will be done to prevent it happening again through long-term infrastructure investment
- what donation amount will be made to a named local organisation as a meaningful apology to the affected community.

Context from the session:

"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."

"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."



South West Water has set out actions on incident communication and community funding, but has not agreed to donations linked to individual incidents. **Its full response is shown on the following pages.**

Topic	Action code	Action	Timings / clarifications
Communication	SW28	Promote the 'In Your Area' website feature through social media so customers can find information about local leakage, supply interruptions and other network issues.	SWW will start the campaign on 1st October 2026 - and will run this weekly. We will use 3 social media channels: Instagram, Facebook, twitter. The campaign scope is the promotion of the 'in your area' webpage through organic social content.
	SW29	Continue holding local community meetings after incidents causing significant or prolonged disruption, explaining what happened, the response and planned local investment to help prevent recurrence, and giving affected customers an opportunity to ask questions.	South West Water has provided examples of previous meetings and committed to organising or supporting events "where applicable". The criteria for which incidents will trigger a meeting, the expected timeframe and responsibility for arranging it remain to be clarified.
Keep customers updated on investment to reduce pollution incidents	SW30	Publish quarterly website updates on the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan, reporting progress and the environmental outcomes of investment and improvement programmes.	Quarterly reporting confirmed. Reporting periods, the first publication window and the timeframe for subsequent website updates remain to be agreed. South West Water has said it cannot commit to specific publication dates.
Community funding	SW31	Consider opportunities to prioritise Better Futures Fund support for local projects in communities that have experienced particular challenges.	Process change confirmed. SWW to define qualifying "particular challenges", confirm the first funding round using the revised process / explain how applications considered through this route and their outcomes will be recorded and communicated.
	SW32	Share an update with Water Voice community members every six months on the community groups and charities funded through the Better Futures Fund.	SWW will share this through water voice community via CCW team through a PowerPoint update in November and June.

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Full response from South West Water

Communication

- We will continue to provide information on pollution incidents, spills and environmental performance through WaterFit Live, and we will review whether additional information, greater detail or alternative communication channels would better meet customers' needs. We will also undertake customer research on the WaterFit Live platform to better understand how customers want to access and view pollution and spill information, allowing us to improve the platform in line with customer expectations.
- We will run a social media campaign encouraging customers to register their contact details through MyAccount, enabling us to provide direct updates when incidents affect them.
- We will also promote our "In Your Area" website feature through our social media channels. This service provides customers with information about leakage, supply interruptions and other local network issues: <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/in-your-area>.
- Where communities have been affected by an incident that has caused significant or prolonged disruption, we will continue to hold local community meetings to engage directly with customers. These meetings provide an opportunity for us to explain what happened, what actions are being taken to address the issue, and what investment is planned in the area to help prevent similar incidents occurring in the future.
- For example, in January we hosted a community meeting in Stithians. The event was promoted through letters sent to local customers and was attended by around 50 residents, alongside local councillors and representatives from the local MP's office. Held at the village hall, the meeting provided customers with the opportunity to speak directly with local operational managers who have detailed knowledge of the network serving their community. We will continue to hold similar events following significant incidents to ensure affected communities have access to information and opportunities to ask questions directly.

Community Funding

- While we cannot commit to making financial donations linked to individual incidents, we will continue to invest in communities through existing programmes, including the Better Futures Fund, alongside our wider commitments to improving environmental performance and delivering positive outcomes for local communities.
- Where communities have experienced particular challenges, we will consider opportunities to prioritise funding through the Better Futures Fund to support local projects that deliver meaningful benefits.
- During 2025/26, we awarded £182,193 across 27 grants throughout the South West Water region. Since April this year, we have already awarded £15,000 in grants to community projects, including:
- Funding for a community space in Bodmin.
- Support for Exmouth Bosom Buddies CIC, enabling the organisation to deliver an additional 100 support sessions providing breastfeeding support, baby groups and opportunities for parents to connect with others. The project supports infant feeding, parental mental health and the reduction of social isolation.
- Funding for the Totnes Rural Area Youth Engagement Project, which is delivering a healthy eating and mental wellbeing programme through 27 sessions funded by South West Water. The programme helps equip young people with healthy eating, budgeting and meal-planning skills while providing peer support, building resilience and improving wellbeing.
- Community members can find out more about the Better Futures Fund here: <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/our-south-west/community/better-futures-fund>
- We will share an update on the community groups and charities we have funded through Better Futures with community members every 6 months.

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Full response from South West Water

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Detailing the actions that South West Water have committed to.

Q1. Addressing reasons for continuing loss of trust

Our community members want meaningful repercussions for senior leadership.

South West Water should commit to meaningful, voluntary financial repercussions for senior leaders until the problems identified by customers - such as repeated sewage spills - have improved substantially, with improvements in the Environment Agency's EPA rating used as one clear measure of progress.

Progress should be assessed independently and validated by community members, rather than relying solely on South West Water's own internal monitoring.

Context from the session:

"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?"

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



South West Water have responded to the issues raised. South West have not made a new commitment here but have confirmed they will deliver against the financial and performance commitments already built into its PR24 plan. CCW will track progress and alert the community to any shortfalls. **South West Water's full response is shown on the following page.**

Topic	Action code	Action
Senior leadership	SW33	South West Water will deliver against the financial and performance commitments already built into its Price Review plan (PR24), including achieving its water quality targets, reaching EPA 4-star status by 2028 , reducing storm overflow use to an average of 16.5 spills per year by 2029 , and contributing to funds supporting community projects and customer affordability.

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Full response from South West Water

Senior Leadership

We understand that there should be meaningful financial repercussions by senior leaders. The accountability of water company executives and board members is subject to requirements established through the Water (Special Measures) Act and the regulatory frameworks implemented by Ofwat. These measures are designed to apply consistently across the industry so that all water companies are held to the same standards. The executive performance-related pay framework implemented by Ofwat already includes consequences linked to environmental and regulatory performance.

The Executive Performance Related Pay rules Ofwat have implemented under the Water (Special Measures) Act already have consequences on the Executives in terms of remuneration against a number of criteria including a) Environmental Performance Assessment 1-star status b) Prosecution in the year for environmental compliance failures by the Environment Agency or c) Ofwat enforcement for failure to delivery duties or licence obligations. The Ofwat Fitness & Propriety Rules (also implemented following the Water (Special Measures) Act) also considers the Board members ability to fulfil their role on an ongoing basis and includes any personal contribution to failures such as those also considered by the Executive Performance Related Pay rules listed above. All of these criteria would result in no bonuses being paid.

All water companies operate to these rules, and they are rules that should apply to the whole industry rather than individual companies, so that the same standards apply to all water companies, wherever they operate.

For South West Water though additional measures are in place. The outcome of the PR24 plan has already embedded consequences for shareholders for these topics, with 0.3% rate of return (£36m or c. £30 per customer) only received through a company specific Ofwat framework, against a number of criteria including water quality targets met each year 2025-2030, EPA 4* status achieved in 2028, storm overflows reduced to an average of 16.5 spills per year in 2029 and agreed contributions two new funds, one supporting community projects and one supporting customer affordability through debt plan matching.

Summary report

Detailing the actions that South West Water have committed to.

Q2. A forward look into how to rebuild trust

Our community would like South West Water to regularly listen and respond to local people.

South West Water should commit to a 12-month programme that genuinely listens to customers living across its service area.

It should regularly ask a large number of local people what they are experiencing, what problems they face and what would help resolve them.

South West Water should then clearly show our community:

- what customers have said;
- what it is changing as a result; and
- what difference those changes are making.

Our community members should review the findings and confirm whether they accurately reflect how people across the South West Water area really feel.

Context from the session:

“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 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.”



South West Water have responded to the issues raised. South West have confirmed two commitments in response, with some remaining details to be clarified with South West Water. **South West Water’s full response is shown on the following page.**

Topic	Action code	Action	Timings / clarification pending
Listening to customers and acting on feedback	SW34	From Winter 2026, run two independently delivered quarterly customer tracking surveys through 2030: an all-customer survey of approximately 2,500 customers, including 900 from the South West Water region, and a PSR/vulnerable-customer survey of approximately 300 South West Water customers per quarter, using representative sampling.	The tracker survey will launch by 31st October. 900 in a year, 225 per quarter. The external research agency will stratify the sample based on region (such as Devon v Cornwall), socio demographics, health and disability etc and will be broadly representative of our customer population the sample will be collected throughout the quarter rather than at a specific time so there is no bias from a snapshot in time.
	SW35	Share quarterly tracker updates and six-monthly survey findings with Water Voice community members, beginning with a first update in March 2027.	Confirm with SWW how the quarterly updates and six-monthly reports will differ

Summary report

Full response from South West Water

Listening to customers and acting on feedback

We will implement two large-scale quarterly customer tracking surveys and commit to running these to 2030.

1. An all Customer Survey, engaging approximately 2,500 customers, representative of our customer base by geography and socio-demographic profile. This means we will be surveying 900 customers from South West Water region. This research is subject to strict sampling methodology which ensures that it is not self-selecting meaning individuals can't volunteer to take part), individual customers are targeted based on a range of factors and given the opportunity to respond. It is also important to note that we triangulate our research findings with both independent research done by the regulators (CCW & Ofwat) and our operational insight to ensure findings are consistent.

2. A Priority Services Register (PSR) and Vulnerable Customer Survey, engaging approximately 300 South West Water customers per quarter, representative of vulnerable customer groups.

Both surveys will be independently delivered by specialist research agencies using robust sampling methodologies to ensure findings accurately reflect customer experiences and views.

The surveys will provide a consistent measure of customer sentiment over time, while also allowing flexibility to explore emerging issues, local concerns and company-specific topics.

These surveys will begin from Winter 2026 following completion of procurement and survey design we will provide the first update to community members in March 2027.

Using research insights

We will report survey findings with community members every 6 months and use the insight to identify trends, emerging concerns and opportunities for improvement. Through our Consumer Involvement Forward Plan which will be published once a year in July, we will share examples of customer feedback and case studies of how this feedback has informed decision making within the business and created outcomes that are fully informed by customer insight. We will publish a customer friendly summary of our consumer involvement update and forward plan to make sure this is easily accessible. To give community members further insights we will share a quarterly update on the tracker survey so that community members have an overview of the findings and understanding of broader customer sentiment.