Summary report

Autumn Accountability Session with Dŵr Cymru

As part of CCW's Water Voice programme, Accountability Sessions allow community members to challenge water company performance, question senior representatives and identify actions to improve customer experiences.

Accountability Session | Wednesday 21st October 2026
Report published: **Friday 30th October**

Community members questioned Dŵr Cymru's senior representatives about financial transparency, pollution and rising bills. They wanted clearer evidence of where their money goes, what improvements it delivers and when results will become visible.

The Action Plan Review challenged the overdue financial summary and sought a clear, balanced explanation of spending. The Performance Review focused on physical improvements to reduce sewage pollution, with measurable results and delivery milestones.

During the Q&A, members explored regional bill differences and support for struggling working households.

The key discussion points, company responses and customer requests are outlined on the following pages.

Action Plan Review
Q1: Explaining where bills go

Members challenged the overdue summary and requested a clear breakdown of spending, executive pay and previous year comparisons.

The company promised a simple report within one month. Members wanted local examples linking spending to improvements, balanced reporting and regular updates.

Performance Review
Q2: Reducing sewage pollution

Members wanted specific works, delivery dates and measurable reductions in pollution affecting local rivers and coastal waters.

The company described sewer replacements, treatment upgrades and storm overflow investment. Members sought milestones, results against targets and evidence of local progress.

Q&A Q3:
Bill increases and regional differences

Members questioned regional bill differences and recent sharp increases.

The company explained infrastructure costs and investment needs. Members wanted clearer links between charges and benefits, alongside answers about future increases and how affordability would influence investment decisions.

Q&A Q4:
Help for struggling households

Members asked about help for working households outside social tariff eligibility.

The company described payment support, debt assistance and metering. Members wanted these households considered in future plans.

The questioner welcomed more frequent usage information and the meter application route.

What is the purpose of this report and what happens next?

This report summarises the key discussions and actions raised by Water Voice community members during the Dŵr Cymru Accountability Session held on 21st October 2026. The actions outlined reflect the improvements community members would like Dŵr Cymru to make. These are community-led requests and do not represent confirmed commitments from the company at this stage. Dŵr Cymru will create a formal action plan by Monday 30th November 2026, setting out its response to each action, what it intends to deliver and the proposed timescales.

CCW will then monitor progress against the company's commitments and provide monthly updates, allowing community members to see what has changed and continue to hold the company to account.

23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham, B2 4BH

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Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

Q1. Why did Action 1 [1] miss its deadline and by when will you show customers, in plain English, where our bills go and what that spending has improved?

Context from the session:

Members challenged the missed 31 July deadline and the lack of a clear explanation by their September briefing. Some had only just received the draft summary, while others had not seen it.
Those who had reviewed it felt that headline spending figures lacked the detail and comparisons needed to judge performance. Members wanted to understand expenditure on infrastructure, salaries and bonuses and what customers receive in return.
Several members said the delay had increased suspicion. They preferred a useful initial report, followed by improvements, to continued silence.

Existing activity context:

Dŵr Cymru said detailed financial and performance information was already publicly available. It attributed the delay to difficulties producing a short summary with sufficient detail and context.
The company described changes to its communications and customer research arrangements. The Chair and facilitator clarified that company-led research serves a separate purpose from Water Voice's independent accountability role.

New actions requested by community members:

1A. Deliver the overdue summary and confirm responsibility

Complete the existing Action 1 as a priority, reflecting the commitment to provide the report within one month of the session.
The formal response should confirm:

- **Delivery date:** The calendar date when members will receive it.
- **Responsibility:** The lead accountable for completing the action.
- **Explanation:** Why members did not receive a timely explanation of the original delay.

Share a usable version without waiting for every presentational preference to be resolved. Identify any outstanding information and when it will follow.

1B. Show where customers' money goes and make comparisons meaningful

- Provide a concise breakdown of income and spending, including infrastructure, operating costs, salaries and executive remuneration.
- Use clear figures and proportions, explaining what each category includes. Show previous year comparisons and explain significant changes. Where useful, include comparable information from other companies.

Members wanted a balanced account, including weaker results and missed targets. Large spending totals and positive headlines alone did not allow them to judge whether performance had improved.

Actions requested continued overleaf...

[1] **Dŵr Cymru, Action 1:** *Review upcoming reports and, where possible, produce a customer friendly summary that clearly explains key financial information and areas of concern, including spending, executive pay and how money has been used.*

Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

Q1. Why did Action 1 miss its deadline and by when will you show customers, in plain English, where our bills go and what that spending has improved?

New actions requested by community members:

1C. Connect spending to measurable improvements

Use local examples to explain:

- **Work delivered:** What the company spent and completed.
- **Results achieved:** What changed for customers or the environment.
- **Next steps:** What remains outstanding and when benefits should become visible.

Where results take longer to emerge, provide milestones that customers can track. Link environmental examples to Question 2.

1D. Keep the summary simple and update it regularly

- Use plain language and clear charts in a concise document, with signposting to detailed information.
- Members challenged the need for an interactive format. They supported a simple customer summary alongside annual reporting, with consistent year-on-year comparisons.
- Confirm the publication cycle and how members can give feedback on whether the report answers their questions.

Company response and clarification required:

Alun Shurmer committed to providing a simple, intuitive report within one month. The Chair reinforced the need to include remuneration and signpost further detail.

The company sought confirmation of the priority content. These requests consolidate that content without requiring agreement on every design preference.
The exact delivery date, future publication cycle and feedback arrangements remain to be confirmed. Members should be able to assess whether the report fulfils Action 1, including whether the information is clear, balanced and sufficiently complete.

Further clarification requested:

Explain precisely what prevented delivery of the existing Action 1, identifying any information, approval or presentation issues still unresolved. Confirm whether any underlying figures were disputed and, if so, which. Explain why the agreed core information could not have been supplied while the presentation was refined.

Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

Q2. Which physical improvements will reduce sewage spills and pollution in the places affecting us, by when, and how will your results against Ofwat's measures show that higher bills are making a difference?

Context from the session:

Members described concerns about pollution in the River Wye and coastal waters, including its effect on wildlife, recreation and confidence in their local environment. They welcomed concrete investment examples and recognised that major infrastructure problems take time to resolve. However, they wanted measurable progress throughout the programme, with clear starting points, milestones and results.
Members also questioned how monitoring locations are selected and how the evidence can demonstrate improvements in the places that concern them.

Existing activity context:

Dŵr Cymru acknowledged that its two-star environmental performance was not good enough. The company said it was replacing pumped sewers that had burst and caused serious pollution incidents, with all those responsible for serious incidents included in its five-year replacement programme. It also described installing phosphorus removal at wastewater treatment works and improving storm overflows.
The company said it would prioritise overflows causing the greatest environmental harm. Members wanted these programmes connected to local delivery and measurable outcomes.

New actions requested by community members:

2A. Identify the physical improvements and route to delivery

Set out the priority locations and planned work, including relevant sewer replacements, treatment upgrades and storm overflow interventions.
For each priority project or clearly defined programme, provide:

- **Starting position:** The problem and why the location has been prioritised.
- **Planned work:** The physical improvements and intended environmental benefit.
- **Delivery milestones:** Interim stages and expected completion dates.
- **Expected results:** The reduction in pollution or other improvement the work should achieve.

Include examples relevant to the rivers and coastal areas discussed. Show what will be delivered within the current programme and what requires longer-term investment.

2B. Show whether pollution is reducing against targets

- Bring together results for pollution incidents, serious pollution incidents and storm overflow performance.
- Show actual results against relevant regulatory targets, previous years and appropriate company comparisons. Explain the measures and any limitations affecting comparisons.
- Support statements about progress with figures and the period covered. Distinguish investment, completed work and environmental results so customers can judge whether expenditure is making a difference.

Actions requested continued overleaf...

Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

Q2. Which physical improvements will reduce sewage spills and pollution in the places affecting us, by when, and how will your results against Ofwat's measures show that higher bills are making a difference?

New actions requested by community members:

2C. Explain monitoring and demonstrate local results

- Explain where monitoring takes place, who selects the locations and how environmental regulators check the evidence.
- Show how upstream and downstream monitoring identifies harm and measures improvement.
- Clarify Dŵr Cymru's contribution where other pollution sources affect local results.

2D. Make environmental spending and delivery visible

- Break down environmental investment, including the storm overflow programme and Ofwat enforcement package.
- Explain what each programme funds, how the totals relate and progress against planned spending and delivery. Distinguish works funded through bills from those in the enforcement package.
- Confirm whether the work remains on schedule.

2E. Report progress regularly and address shortfalls

- Agree regular, accessible updates on completed work, results against targets and next milestones.
- Explain shortfalls, corrective action and revised dates.
- Show how future planning and oversight will avoid repeating past problems.

Company response and clarification required:

Dŵr Cymru agreed that environmental and project information could be made more accessible. It described regulatory oversight of monitoring and ongoing environmental harm assessments.
Steve Wilson said the storm overflow investment and additional enforcement-related spending would be delivered within the five-year period. He described a programme addressing 147 of approximately 2,300 overflows.
Site level dates, quantified improvements and an update schedule remain to be supplied. No date for achieving a higher environmental rating was agreed.
The Chair clarified that companies propose investment plans and can appeal regulatory decisions.

Further clarification requested:

Identify the investments Dŵr Cymru proposed, which the regulator rejected or reduced, and whether the company appealed those decisions. Distinguish regulatory constraints from decisions that remained within the company's control, including its investment proposals, prioritisation and delivery.

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q3. Why do Dŵr Cymru bills appear higher than in some other regions and what do customers receive in return?

Context from the session:

Members wanted to understand regional bill differences and recent sharp increases. They recognised the need for investment but questioned what continuing increases would mean for household finances.
The discussion explored historic investment, borrowing and whether wider metering could change the position.

Existing activity context:

Dŵr Cymru attributed regional differences to the cost of its infrastructure relative to the population served, including wastewater treatment and coastal environmental protection. It explained that customers fund ongoing operation and maintenance as well as investment over time. The company linked recent bill increases to the larger investment programme for the current regulatory period.
On metering, it said wider uptake changes how charges are distributed between customers but does not increase overall allowed revenue.

New actions requested by community members:

3A. Explain recent increases and what customers receive

- Build on the existing Action 1 with a clear explanation of the main reasons bills have risen.
- Distinguish new investment, operating and maintenance costs, and the financing of infrastructure over time. Connect these costs to the improvements customers should receive.
- Address why bills have increased sharply recently, as well as why Dŵr Cymru's costs differ from those elsewhere.

3B. Address the concern about future affordability

- Explain what is known about bills during the current regulatory period and what remains uncertain beyond it.
- Show how customer evidence on affordability will influence the next investment plan, including the priorities and trade-offs being tested. Explain how customers will hear what changed because of their input.

Company response and outstanding clarification:

The company described engagement continuing through 2027 to inform its business plan for submission in 2028. It said affordability was central to this work.
It did not establish whether substantial increases would continue over the next 10 to 15 years. No bill cap or reduction was agreed.

Members also questioned the independence and cost of research. The company explained its use of independent research, internal insight and review processes. No separate research related action was agreed.

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q4. What will you do for people struggling with bills who do not qualify for your current support?

Context from the session:

The question focused on working households under financial pressure who fall outside social tariff eligibility. The questioner asked for these customers to be considered in future plans, while recognising the need for investment.

Existing activity context:

Dŵr Cymru said its specialist service supports customers beyond those receiving benefits. It described short-term financial support, reduced payment arrangements, an arrears scheme, metering, water-efficiency advice and referrals to other organisations. These were existing services, rather than new schemes agreed during the session.

New actions requested by community members:

4A. Explain how support addresses households outside social tariff eligibility

- Clarify which options are available, how eligibility is assessed and how customers can access help.
- Distinguish support that reduces the amount owed from arrangements that change payment timing. Explain the options for households already on meters or still struggling after water-efficiency advice.
- The formal response should address how these households will be considered in future affordability plans.

4B. Confirm the meter and usage-information offer

- The questioner welcomed more frequent usage information and asked how an existing meter could be upgraded.
- Kit Wilson said customers could request a meter online, by telephone or through web chat, with installation within 30 days. He described new meters capable of providing monthly readings and helping identify leaks.
- Clarify how this assurance applies to replacement of existing meters, when monthly information becomes available and any installation constraints.

Company response and status:

The questioner welcomed the explanation and received an application link. No new tariff, wider social tariff eligibility or guaranteed household saving was agreed.
The outstanding issue is how effectively existing and future support addresses customers struggling outside the main eligibility thresholds.

Attendance list

Roch Cheroux	CEO of Dŵr Cymru
Alun Shurmer	Chief Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement Officer at Dŵr Cymru
Kit Wilson	Chief Customer Officer at Dŵr Cymru
Steve Wilson	Chief Operations Officer at Dŵr Cymru
Nicky Taylor	Managing Director of Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead Facilitator
Rhodri Williams	Welsh Board Member for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) - Chair
11 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under Dŵr Cymru

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Good evening everyone and thank you for joining us. I'm Rhodri Williams, and my job is to chair this evening's discussion. I'm the Welsh Board Member at the Consumer Council for Water, CCW. Tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme, and the purpose is simple but important, to give you as customers a stronger, more direct voice in how Dŵr Cymru performs, communicates, and improves.

The session is about accountability. It's an opportunity for community members to question senior leaders from Dŵr Cymru directly about the issues that matter most, what needs to improve and what will change as a result of the discussion. It is not a complaints hearing and it's not a technical enquiry. It's a structured, customer-led conversation focused on accountability, learning and hopefully agreeing some clear, practical actions.

Now, as you all know, the topics we're going to be covering tonight have not been chosen by CCW or by Dŵr Cymru, they've been shaped by community members through the pre-task, the briefing session, and Spotlight research and wider Water Voice discussions. This is very much your agenda. I'd like to, if I can, set a clear tone at the outset. We expect it to be respectful, but at the same time, a challenging discussion. Community members please feel free to be able to speak openly and honestly about your experiences and expectations, and equally, when colleagues from Dŵr Cymru are answering questions, I'd appreciate it very much if you could be precise, clear, and transparent.

Please everyone, when you're not speaking, if you could keep your microphones muted to avoid any background noise, that would help a lot. But please be better than I am in turning it back on when you do want to say something. As you're aware, the session's being fully transcribed, and the agreed outcomes will be published. Dŵr Cymru will also be expected to publish an action plan, responding to the commitments made, and that transparency is a key part of what makes this process meaningful.

In terms of ground rules, we'll take one person at a time, keep contributions focused and concentrate on forward-looking actions. What will change, by when, and how customers will know. I'd now like to briefly introduce those who are joining us this evening, first you've already heard from him, our independent facilitator from Taylor McKenzie Research, Nicky, who will be guiding the various elements of discussion during the meeting.

Representing Dŵr Cymru this evening are Roch Cheroux, the company's Chief Executive, Alun Shurmer, Chief Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement Officer, Kit Wilson, Chief Customer Officer, and Steve Wilson, Chief Operations Officer. Thank you all for taking the time and making the effort to join us this evening, and when it comes to answering various questions, I'll probably leave it to you to decide who starts and who finishes and that's very much up to you.

Thank you all again for taking the time, my main task is to keep us on time this evening, so hopefully we'll be able to do that without much interruption from me. So, without further ado, I'll hand over to Nicky who's going to lead the session. Thanks, Nicky.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks very much, Rhodri. I've got a couple of bits of information to go through just now, just to let you know how things are going to be handled in terms of the transcript. In the published transcript and report, customer names will be anonymised. After this session, the community members will have the opportunity to flag anything personal that they would prefer to be removed or further anonymised before publication.

The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect discussion and the actions agreed, and not to single out individuals. There are three main parts to tonight's session. First, we will review part of the existing action plan and challenge Dŵr Cymru on the action or actions the community agreed needed to be strengthened.

Session transcript

Second, we will ask one new performance challenge question, developed from the issues that community members prioritised during the briefing session and throughout the surveys that they've been completing over the last few months.

Third, we'll move on to a shorter Q&A style session where community members will ask the additional questions prioritised during their briefing session. For each of the first two questions, we will use the same accountability cycle - a community member will ask the agreed question, representatives from Dŵr Cymru will be able to introduce themselves, and one they've done that, they will have five or so minutes to respond to what they've heard. There will be a handy timer on my screen to help you keep to time.

Community members will then have a good amount of time to react to that response and identify what they felt was clear, what they felt was missing, and what maybe needs to be strengthened for them as customers to better understand what's going to happen. We will be creating a live document in the background, we've got a couple of analysts from Taylor McKenzie who will be inputting into that as we talk, and that will specify different actions and outcomes that should form part of Dŵr Cymru's follow-up action plan. I will then share that on the screen, so that everyone can see it for full transparency and agree upon what's there.

At the end of the first cycle, Dŵr Cymru and the representatives will have a short opportunity to explain if any of the proposed actions are not feasible and why, or anything they want to just put across in clearer terms to add to the action plan.

During the Q&A we will use a lighter version of this process, the nominated community member will as the question and the company will respond and then the question asker and others in the community can follow-up and have more of a discussive conversation with the representatives from Dŵr Cymru.

Before we get started, I'm very quickly going to go around the room and ask the community members just to introduce themselves and tell us where abouts they are in Wales, and we'll hopefully get through that pretty quickly. So, we'll do it in the order that I can see on my screen.

Community Member 1: Hello, good evening, I'm Community Member 1, and I am based in Llanon in Ceredigion.

Community Member 2: Hi, I'm Community Member 2, and I'm based just outside of Bridgend in South Wales.

Community Member 3: I'm Community Member 3, I live in Penarth in the beautiful Vale of Glamorgan.

Community member 4: I'm Community Member 4, and I live in Monmouth in the Wye Valley.

Community member 5: Hi, I'm Community Member 5, and I'm from Bridgend.

Community Member 6: I'm Community Member 6, I live in sunny Barry Island in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Community Member 7: Hi, I'm Community Member 7, and I live in Cardiff.

Community Member 8: Hi, I'm Community Member 8, I live in Bridgend.

Community Member 9: Evening all, yeah, my name is Community Member 9, and I'm from Pontypool.

Community Member 10: Hi, I'm Community Member 10 and I live in Llanfarian, just outside Aberystwyth.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: I would now like to hand back to Rhodri, who will kick us off with the beginning of the first question.

CCW Chair: That first question is going to look back at commitments already made in Dŵr Cymru's action plan. During the briefing session community members agreed that Action 1, concerning financial transparency needed for the scrutiny, and I'd like now to invite Community Member 6, to ask the first question, please.

Community Member 6: Yeah, thanks Rhodri. You marked this [2]Action 1 as "delayed", and by the time we had our briefing on 23rd September, we had neither any response to Action 1, or even a clear explanation as to why there was no response. Given that we all felt that this was a key action dealing as it did with financial accountability, financial transparency and to some extent financial analysis, we were, I think it's fair to say, disappointed that we hadn't received any information at all on that, given the fact that it was key in showing us as customers where our bills go, what spending has been delivered and what hasn't been delivered. Therefore, we couldn't really make that much progression on comparisons with other authorities.

So really my question is a simple one, why did you not provide that information, and as a courtesy, why did you give information as to why you didn't provide it?

CCW Chair: Great, thank you Community Member 6. Again, can I ask if you can be as specific as possible in your answers and hopefully keep it as concise as you can to the five minutes that is allocated. Can I just also remind community members, please listen carefully, and make notes of anything you think is unclear, incomplete, not strong enough, whatever your view is on it. If you make a note, so that you can participate in the discussion that Nicky will be leading later on. Okay, I shall now hand over to Roch, I assume, in the first place.

Roch Cheroux: Thanks, Rhodri. I'm Roch Cheroux, I'm the Chief Executive of Dŵr Cymru. I've been in this position since January this year, so it's been nine months now.

So, to answer straight to the question, we completely understand that this is the critical information that our customers want, we have been working on it. We have something that we have produced that we're not happy with. This is a document that has been circulated to this group, but we are also consulting our customers because we want to make this document exactly what our customers are expecting from us.

We are very clear that transparency is something that we want to deliver and we are going to do it. We are requesting your help in making it happen because again, we want something that delivers on your expectations. On this, I'm going to hand over to Alun, who will give you more information.

Alun Shurmer: Thanks very much for the invitation to participate today as well, I really appreciate it. As Roch said, and to be quite frank, we are not happy with the draft that we prepared. We prepared a document that looked to summarise the annual report and accounts, which was what was discussed at the last group meeting, which looked at investment and wider performance data.

The challenge that was set by this group back in March was actually to try to get it to a couple of pages and preferably infographics with a similar amount of information. When we drafted it, we were unhappy with what was developed. We have since our session back in March, we have taken a number of steps to try to improve communication more generally across the business.

Firstly, we created our own consumer customer panel to work with us to help inform our communications activity and other decision-making that we're doing, so that we can test materials and test our business decision-making from day-to-day with them as well. That's one part of our wider customer engagement programme that we've been embarking on and trying to increase over the course of the summer.

[2] Action 1: Review upcoming reports and, where possible, produce a customer friendly summary that clearly explains key financial information and areas of concern, including spending, Executive pay and how money has been used.

Session transcript

Secondly, we've brought in additional, it's like the restructure we've seen in the business, or since Roch joined in January, we've totally restructured the business from top to bottom, from a new Executive Team through to every team in the business being affected in some way or form, to try and be more efficient and improve the services that we're providing, including the strengthening of our communications function and our customer insight function, so that we can have the foundations to actually improve what we're doing.

The third aspect of that beyond the people and the insight, is actually using external agencies to work alongside us to help in terms of best practice but also to challenge what we're doing. So, these agencies we've brought onboard in the last few months, we have started developing new materials, we are developing new social media content to explain very clearly where funding, where projects are going, and how we work as a company to help educate customers as well about what we're doing. They will be released this side of Christmas with a new wider campaign coming in in January.

It's specifics about the wider explanation of where the money is going, we're doing that on a far more local level and we're increasing, and have increased, the visibility of where that local investment is going on a day-to-day basis, either through direct letter-writing and newsletters to communities that are affected by those plans, but also on social media to give wider information, or a wider reach of what we're doing.

As we said back in January, this is our number one biggest problem in terms of communication. Number one is making sure we get the right level of information in a way that is understood by customers and in a format that they receive. Because we know that it will take usually about seven touch points for people to be able to remember the information and to see the information they've got, so it's not one phase or one response, one action or one document that helps us do that. That's why we're trying to do it across numerous different phases.

So, we've built the foundations to help improve it. We've started improving it from day-to-day, but that single document that you referred to wasn't good enough, and which is why we've been testing it and trying to build it further, and we have had those discussions with CCW as Roch has said, and it has been shared, I believe, in the last 48 hours with the community, but you may not yet have seen it.

But the point here is, that is not good enough in terms of the document, and we know that, which is why we want actually more customer input to ask what is the information, what is the style of document that will have the greatest impact with our customer base? This isn't something we can get right on our own, we have to have that insight. But the long and the short of it is, we didn't get it done to the standard that we wanted it, and that is why we didn't publish it at the time.

CCW Chair: Thanks for that response. We're now going to pause, turn back to the community to test what they've just heard from you. Nicky, over to you to lead that discussion.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you very much, Rhodri, and thank you very much to the team at Dŵr Cymru for your response there. We've got an opportunity here as customers to talk amongst ourselves for the next 15 to 20 minutes. Based on what we've heard, based on what we want as customers, how can we really strengthen what we saw in Action 1 and how can we help Dŵr Cymru build on the outputs that they're going to be producing?

I'll go back first of all to Community Member 6, who posed the question, and really just getting an understanding of what you thought of that response and what you thought the best next steps need to look like?

Community Member 6: Two points really stood out to me really for that, Nicky, one is that, and I guess it's a response directed back to Alun, what is better in response to customer feedback, either to produce a document that is perhaps incomplete or not in exactly the format that you would want, or actually not to produce anything at all?

Now, in my view, it is best to produce at least maybe an interim document that had at least some of the financial information that we sought, rather than produce absolutely nothing at all, and then circulate something that certainly, I don't think any members here have seen in the last 48 hours?

The second thing I would say is that Alun was saying that you seem to be setting up other panels and other groups of customers and consumers, and you've already got that here. You've already got that here and elsewhere. It seems to me that you're sort of reinventing the wheel by gathering together customer opinion when you've got at least, I would have thought, adequate and well-structured and well formatted customer opinion and customer groups already?

TMcK Facilitator: What does everyone else think about what we heard and what Community Member 6 has just said, is there anything to add to that?

Community Member 4: Yeah, for me just listening to it initially, it just feels like, I don't know if the right term is like a "cover up", that you are covering up the facts, so delaying it is finding different ways to cover up what you're trying to hide from us, possibly? I'm not suggesting you are trying to hide anything, but that's the impression that it gives by not releasing at least an interim report. It's that you're gathering, creating more groups, is that a cost that we want? I appreciate the groups might be free, but it's a cost of time and staff. Why weren't these groups formed before you released the document anyway on its due date, why is it an afterthought? So, it just creates a bit of confusion, and I suppose "suspicion" is the right word for me.

Community Member 1: Yeah, the draft document has some interesting, useful information in it, but it's very light touch on the financials. And what we heard from Dŵr Cymru there was they feel like they need more information from us in order to deliver the document that we need as customers, but I feel like the action point that was agreed at the previous session is very clear that we want key financial information across all areas of spending, including pay. So, it strikes me as odd that that couldn't be included in that first draft?

TMcK Facilitator: Was there anything else, Community Member 1, that you thought could go in there?

Community Member 1: No, I think that's it for now.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 10, do you want to jump in there?

Community Member 10: Yeah, I'd like to say thank you first of all for your explanation. What I felt it really didn't give us was, and I know you're maybe not ready to give us specifics yet, but what we really want to know as customers, we're paying more money to you all the time on our bills is, where is the money going in terms of infrastructure, salaries, bonuses? We just want the basics, we want to know how much have you spent on upgrading the systems this year, how much have you spent on bonuses, how much have you spent on salaries? And interesting question would be, have salaries increased the amount, have you actually recruited more people recently, so have the salaries cost gone up?

These are all things we just need to know, and I think there doesn't need to be too much thought behind it, it just needs to be in black and white, plain, simple, and easy to read. So, I can't understand why – it seems to me you're overthinking it because all we want to know is, in a format that's understandable, a pie chart or something, what percentage of the money that you get in is going out on what?

It's quite a simple question, and I don't know why you can't just give us the answers. So, for me as a customer, I want to know how much have you spent on the infrastructure, how much have you spent on salaries, how much have you spent on bonuses?

All these things are quite simple, I just don't know why you're complicating it? I agree, do you really need to get more customer views on this when you've already got a panel set up here that have been working now for nearly a year on understanding what Welsh Water do, and how they operate, but yet you're going to set up a new panel?

I don't quite understand that. I think we're all feeling a bit frustrated because really, you know what's coming in, you know what's going out, just tell the customers. Thank you.

Community Member 8: Right, the last Zoom meeting was in March or April wasn't it, I think, when we had the discussion? It's now October, so surely they've had plenty of time to sort it out without us? In the first meeting all the views were given, so I can't understand why it's taken so long? That's it.

Community Member 2: It just, sort of, it's easier, "Oh, we didn't like the first report," so to me it sounds like, "We didn't like the first report, so we've gone back to find some more customers that might give us a bit of a view that might be more on our side." It's a little bit like being in a court, if you like, you can find an excellent witness for either side all the time, and it seems it smacks a little bit of, "Well, we didn't like what came up the first time, so we'll chuck it back in, try again and choose some other people," sort of thing, to me anyway. I don't know, it just doesn't seem – what was not to like about the first report, really, what would be so different? I mean figures are figures.

Community Member 9: Yeah, it would just be good to have some follow-up information of why, what was the difficulties in collating this information? Surely Welsh Water behind the scenes have the records of all these different things that we're asking for the information on, why is it hard to get that information? Because looking at the list from the question, and I've just noticed as well this report seems to have been generated last minute, that I've got in my emails from today, which I've only just looked at, it looks very cherry-picked.

Like not all of what we were asking is in there, just a few headlines, "Well, we did this well, we did that well." It doesn't look like a balanced report, it just looks like, "Here's a few things that went well, and we won't tell you about anything else, we didn't like the document for whatever reason, it didn't say the good things that we want to hear, so we'll just delay it or we (overtalking)

TMcK Facilitator: Tell me about that Community Member 9, I know you've only just looked at it, right? But you're saying it's got positive things in it, but you feel like something's missing. What is it that Dŵr Cymru can do to …?

Community Member 9: There's some strapline finance statements in there, but it's by far not complex enough. Like I know they try and make it easy for us to understand, but it's basically like sort of headline, "£1b for the economy, £14m for social tax," you know, it's just like flash statements, it's not how much did you spend last year on this, how has it got better? So, there's nothing about the executive pay, I can't see anything in there, and if it was to be in there, what is that measured on? Has something gone particularly well? It just seems to be missing a lot.

TMcK Facilitator: We spoke about this a lot Community Member 9, in the briefing session, about connecting spending to measurable improvements using local projected examples to understand what's been spent, how that's been delivered for community members, what are the dates. So why is it that's important to you as customers, what does that do to improve your perceptions?

Community Member 9: Well, it's a shame really that this has only just been emailed out today, because I would have read it, I'd like to have a proper good look through that. But yeah, we need comparable information. Let's just pick that one, "We've helped the Welsh economy by £1b."

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To me that just means you've spent £1b. How much did you spend last year, is that an increase or is that a decrease? How is that broken up, what have you actually spent that on? I'd just like to see, like the report is only good if it actually shows us measurable improvements. If we've got nothing to measure it against, how do we even know if that's a good figure or a bad figure? That really spans across a lot of the information in that flash report there.

TMcK Facilitator: I've got a question just in terms of the document itself when it does get produced and it's shared, is it a once-a-year thing, is it quarterly, is a monthly live document we're looking for, does it link places? What does the ideal final output look like, what would work for you as community members, do you feel?

Community Member 8: Well, it should be as short as possible and in a language everybody can understand without any jargon and advanced rhetoric, you know, that just confuses you that does. It should be straightforward, which is hard for Welsh Water to do, isn't it, really, if you think about it, how long it's taken them? We're still in the same place as last year, really, you know, we haven't learned anything concrete, have we? I haven't anyway, certainly.

TMcK Facilitator: In defence to Welsh Water and the report when they were explaining where they were at just now, they need to make sure that everyone can understand it at every level, and I think there is a great deal of detail required, but obviously to get that into a simple format is clearly quite tricky. So, it will be interesting to understand your thoughts on that?

I think Community Member 1, you had your hand up first, so I'll come to you, and then I'll come to Community Member 10, and you can tell us what your thoughts are?

Community Member 1: Yeah, so I wanted to start by just saying I completely agree with Community Member 10 in the way that the financials should be presented. I've seen other organisations do it, I've seen the government do it, to explain tax revenue, you know, just have a pie chart, "Look, this is the total share of funds we've received in, this is how it's been spent."

Then in terms of how information is presented, I think as Community Member 9 said, we need some kind of baseline to understand these figures, and whether that's comparing to last year, comparing to other water companies. I think that information needs to be there even if it doesn't paint the results in a good light, and it comes across as failure. Because to me being transparent about failings is probably better than hiding it and saying, "We're not happy with the report, we're not going to share it," because that just creates this conception, you know, everyone just feels like, "Oh, they're hiding something," and you create this environment where there's a real lack of trust in the company.

So those were my thoughts, and I just wanted to put on record as well, are Welsh Water still committed to delivering Action 1 as it was agreed at the previous session, because that wasn't totally clear to me in their response? And when do they feel that that could be delivered now in the way that we want it?

TMcK Facilitator: Fantastic Community Member 1, very well put, thank you. I'll come to Community Member 10 now?

Community Member 10: Yeah, I agree with Community Member 1's point there about giving us a new deadline for this Action 1. My point was that every company, every year, have to submit their set of accounts and they're checked by an auditor, I assume an independent body as well.

So, these figures are there, that's what I don't quite get, the figures are there, so if you just put it in a pie chart and present it to us, and maybe last year's figures because we could then compare them last year to this year, so two financial years, so we can clearly see them from a pie chart how things have changed over the last two years, so we can compare as customers where you're spending our money.

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I think give us time then, maybe the year after then, you sent us another, you compare, so it's always comparing the last two years to see how things are going and how the money has been spent, how much extra revenue you're getting in from our bills, for us to start understanding how this money is being spent. Because I think what is frustrating for us as customers is we don't know, and we can't see where our money's going and the bills keep going up and up. So, if you're using our money for improving things, and we see the results, then we'll all be very pleased, but we do need to see that information.

I think the longer you hide it from customers or I'm not so sure you're trying to hide it, but the longer this is hidden, I think the more questions get asked about, "Where is our money going, our bills are going up?" And people are getting a bit frustrated and cross with the situation, so I think it does need action, and I think it does seem quite a simple task to me.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you very much, Community Member 10. I'm going to go to Community Member 3 and then Community Member 6, and I'm going to summarise things on my screen and then we can take the conversation forward. So, Community Member 3, if you want to come in now?

Community Member 3: Just a couple of thoughts, I agree pretty much with what others have said. I don't think we're expecting you to produce new information, you don't have to go and create something new. In my own way I imagine you could get, a McKenzie intern to sit and look at your big, huge, multi-part document that is almost unintelligible to me and go through the index and pick out the narrative parts and put them all together, and we might have a report. I think it would be easier for me to be constructive.

I haven't seen this document that Community Member 1, has described and Community Member 9, so I don't know. But you said Alun that you've got a customer panel to test ideas on, well why not test them on us? Don't say, "Here's the document," say, "Is this what you wanted, is this what we think?" I mean you could test it on us, that would have been a nice gesture. And of course, we feel a bit like someone who's discovered their husband's been going out for drinks with another woman, "You've got another panel?" So that's a bit of a shock.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 6, you can finish us off with this section.

Community Member 6: Really, it's just echoing what Community Member 3 said then, every organisation however large, however small, has to have financial data, it has to keep financial data both for appraising past performance and for planning for future development. We all do that, we all do that in our own households, every organisation does that.

Actually, the fact that Dŵr Cymru cannot produce even a very simple pie chart or single A4 sheet of statistics or analysis, is really worrying. Because either they haven't got that analysis or they don't particularly want it to be published, both of which are quite frightening. So that's the point I wanted to say.

TMcK Facilitator: Before I share my screen, I just want to clarify a couple of things. So, obviously Water Voice was set up for very specific purpose, you know, absolutely want to encourage companies to have alternative routes for engaging with their customers outside of Water Voice, that's just a healthy thing to happen.

The panels that we have are completely independent and they're not specifically set up to provide research or feedback on documents or reports that aren't currently shared with customers. It is the role of the company to identify the best ways to gather customer insight to ensure communications delivered for the customers. I think that was something that was made quite clear from Dŵr Cymru's response, and it is absolutely what they should be looking to do.

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Now, the panels themselves, we can absolutely put things in the community, and we would expect you to feed back on those, but clearly we need more time to be able to do that than a couple of days before the session. So going forward that is absolutely we can look to do. I'm going to share my screen now, and I'm going to read out what we've captured. I just want to make sure it's capturing everything that we've spoken about, and then we're going to go back and there will be an opportunity for the Execs at Dŵr Cymru to give us some feedback.

So, in terms of the response, so Dŵr Cymru have created a draft version of the Action 1 document, it has been circulated internally and they're wanting to make sure it's perfect, and they don't feel it's quite there yet.

They are creating an internal customer panel, in order to help test materials going forward, to help with business decisions and make sure the customer voice is central to their decision-making.

They have had a massive restructuring since January, it's looking to improve customer service teams, communication routes, the way the format information is delivered.

They also want to utilise external agencies to streamline these practices and keep things independent.

Into the future, they absolutely want to get customer feedback on the Action 1 document including this panel.

They want to create a wider January campaign to explain company investment utilising social media.

In terms of the feedback that we provided just now over the last 10 or 15 minutes, you were really keen that they clearly connect company spending to measurable customer improvements, utilise local examples to bring things to life.

Let customers see in-progress versions of Action 1, make sure that these are updated year on year at a minimum.

Display key financial information across all spending areas, so spending and salaries, infrastructure, and projects. I think there's some people that want things to be kept simple, there are some things that you want to delve into the details, so the document itself needs to be interactive, so that can happen.

Provide baseline measurements to compare past years, and also against other companies, so customers can really understand how money is being spent.

And try your best to use jargon-free language and visualisations, and the government tax spending was mentioned there as being a good way to learn from that.

I think ultimately that the message I'm getting across the community is that when there is silence, when there's lack of communication, when there's a void, it gets filled with distrust, with people who are unsure of what's happening. I think Community Member 1 hit the nail on the head quite nicely when he said that it helps to remove that value for money and lack of understanding that the customers really want to understand more about.

With that in mind, again now that the community members have looked at the screen, can I just check, does this cover everything we've spoken about, is there anything else we want to put in there before I hand back to Rhodri, who will allow Dŵr Cymru to come back in?

Community Member 5: I would just say that it needs to be a priority here, so that should come first before anything else.

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TMcK Facilitator: What sort of timeline, Community Member 5, when should this document be ready to be shared with the community?

Community Member 5: Well, I don't know, how long have they had already? So, a month? I don't know.

TMcK Facilitator: Any other thoughts on that, Community Member 2, do you want to come in?

Community Member 2: I'm just thinking, as long as it's once a year, every company has to have their books balanced for the government by April 1st, so how difficult can it be to produce something? So, you know, every April you know, or by the end of April even, that you'd have something there that you could actually compare to.

I mean I wouldn't expect them to go delving into everything every month or every three months even, because obviously that's a lot of manpower and a lot of work. But at least once a year, if you've got people working on something like this, and as I said in the session that we did ourselves, I mean with all the AI that's around today, surely you can chuck a report in and come up with something, even if you need somebody to tidy it up.

TMcK Facilitator: The annual reports, they come out every July, is it something we should challenge Dŵr Cymru to say, "If you're bringing out your annual report for your shareholders and your senior team, should that also have a customer report that sits next to that, is that fair to say?

Community Member 2: Yeah, so the thing is then, that would kill two birds with one stone. You could do a simple customer version which then if you wanted to deep delve into when you wanted a little bit more, then with links to the shareholders' one. Because obviously you're going to go into more detail and have more jargon because people will understand the jargon more? You could always have a glossary of terms at the end anyway, but yeah, I mean you could probably put them hand-in-hand.

TMcK Facilitator: Very quickly I want to come to Community Member 7 and then to Community Member 11, I know you've been listening intently, have you got any further thoughts of what's been said, anything to add, or are you happy that it represents your opinions?

Community Member 7: I just agree with everything that's been said.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 11, what about yourself?

Community Member 11: Okay, well I came a bit late because of technical troubles, so I've had difficulty catching up, so just give me time, yeah?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, of course, Community Member 11, no problem at all. Community Member 10, we'll finish off with you before I hand back to Rhodri, to allow Dŵr Cymru to respond and then we can move on from there.

Community Member 10: Yeah, I just want to express concern about one point that you've made in the document, "Make document interactive, so level of detail can be selected." We don't need it that complex, we just want a pie chart. I disagree with that, we don't need it interactive, there's no need to make it so complicated, one sheet of paper. I don't know if everyone else agrees, but we don't need it interactive, we just need a plain …

TMcK Facilitator: I think I said that actually Community Member 10, off the back of Community Member 1 wanting a bit more information, and then off the back of Community Member 8 not wanting too much information. So, it's trying to find that balance of how do we manage that? I have seen in the past where documents can be very simple at face value, but you can click to find out further information if you require that.

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Community Member 10: Yeah, I think we need to be careful though, because what we're after is a document that's plain and simple and concise that the majority of the population can understand and something that Welsh Water can produce quickly. I think if we over complicate things, and then Welsh Water will say, "Well, we're trying to make it interactive," well, that's not … My key point is, we just want the key facts in relation to where the money is going. I don't think we need to complicate matters, that's my personal opinion. But everyone's got their own opinion, sorry.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 3, I'll come to you and then I'll hand back to Rhodri.

Community Member 3: Just to say I actually think Community Member 10 is right. It just needs to be a simple document and not complicated by the need to make it interactive and then check all the links and then then links (inaudible) disappear. Just keep it simple.

TMcK Facilitator: I will hand back to Rhodri.

CCW Chair: Thank you Nicky and thank you all. I encouraged you at the outset to be forthright, well you've certainly been that. So can we now come back to Roch and Alun for your response please to what you've heard. We'd be very grateful again if you can – there isn't a clock on the screen this time, but we would like to keep to about the five minutes mark, if you can please. Thank you.

Alun Shurmer: I'm going to pick it up if that's okay, Rhodri? Let's be quite frank, the frustration of the panel is palpable. I share quite a lot of that frustration from slightly different perspectives as well. Firstly, I will give the commitment to providing that report within the next month, and I will keep it to the simple, non-interactive version that Community Member 10 and Community Member 3 just referred to. However, I think the reason why I get a little frustrated and my team get a little frustrated in trying to develop these things, as we've seen from the discussion is that there are many different views within the group as to the level of detail, the level of comparative information over a number of years that's required.

The problem with the document that we shared previously is that we don't think that it does give enough information, but that was already at six pages, seven pages long. When we go back to the debate that we had back in March, we had similar conversations and the request then was to have something that's no longer than one or two pages, that was infographic heavy and easily accessible.

But as soon as you do that you fall into the issue that we've just had in the discussion that we've just had that some of that is pretty meaningless because you cannot get the right comparative detail. I've just seen that Community Member 10 has put, "Who is going to read six to seven pages?" This is the challenge.

If we want the comparative information that people are asking for, we're very close back into the territory of the annual reporting the accounts that is already published, that includes all of the financial information, all of the comparative data year on year, all of the balanced information, as I think Community Member 9 mentioned earlier on. How exec remuneration is worked out for the year, all of that information is published in the first week of July every year and is made public on our website. We publicise it through social media and through traditional press releases and things like that as well, to try to bring attention to it.

What we want to do, which I think the committee want us to do, was to distil it down to a very different level of the key points. Now, I'll be quite frank, from this conversation I'm still unclear on exactly what those three points would be, for example, from this group. I have a pie chart, I have a financial table, I have executive pay, we can do that very quickly and share that.

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But there are other people on the group who are telling us they want more information and comparative data, and that is why we've been asking for more customer input to say, "What is the right balance, how do you make it so that people don't think it's too superficial, and that we are in a position to provide the level of information that they want, and we're not being accused of spin?"

And the reason that we've created our own panel is that we can have quick turnaround conversations. To be frank, with this group, the only opportunity we have as a company to engage with you is through these sessions. In total we've had 15 minutes to speak in the year that your panel has come together. We've not had the opportunity to get your questions and feedback on these points.

We suggested with the document that we provided, there was a survey in there, that actually would allow you to give us your feedback directly to us, so we can make those changes quicker, that was rejected. So, we would like to have more engagement with customers to help inform us, this isn't our group, so we can't do it with this one, so we need that as the moderator said, that is why we're going down that route.

But the question over anything to "hide", as somebody mentioned on the call earlier, around the financial information, exec remuneration, all of that is published every year. The financial information and the performance data is published every six months, the next report will be published at the end of November. This was all publicly available. But what we discussed in March and we're discussing again now, is distilling that down into the key points the customers want.

So, my frustration is making sure that we get the key information those customers want into one simple understandable format. What I've taken away from this is, it's a question of that pie chart of the where the money goes, where salaries and things, power investment, performance, yes, done. Again, we publish that regularly, we're looking to publish that quarterly on our website as well. But then some localised information and examples of where that investment is going, we have done that this year through annual bills, we've created a new website called Dŵr Cymru Plans, where you can go down to a local authority level to look at that information.

That is being publicised across social media and has been publicised, it's actually referred to in the Western Mail, for example, the Wales Online last weekend. So, we are trying to push that out to get the information out there. But we're now talking about one single document, which we are totally committed to deliver, but we want to make sure it's the right document with the right information.

The question about putting things out where they're partially accurate or not, I think unfortunately, we're in a position at the moment, somebody mentioned "trust in the sector, trust in the company" and things like that, we're in a position at the moment that any mistake from our side will be jumped upon in some field. So, we're trying to be very careful about how we present things and try to make sure that they're absolutely accurate and there are no inconsistencies between documents.

The worst thing for our position is that we give you, and somebody's already picked up on, we give you a report, that report says that we've reduced pollutions by 30%, or whatever it may be, but it doesn't give you the context around it that says, "Okay, how does that compare, a 30% reduction of diddly squat isn't very much at all?" So, we have to contextualise it properly. As soon as you start going down that territory, it starts becoming a bigger document that becomes unmanageable again.

I think from my perspective, what I very much welcome from this group is a summary of, okay, this is what as a group, rather than as individuals, what you believe are the key points that should be included in there. I've just repeated a few of those points that I think have taken away from it, but I'd really appreciate it from this group to confirm they're the points you'd like us to cover?

Otherwise, I fear that I can send you a document and in two weeks' time, three weeks' time, and you will come back to this session in six months' time, and you'll say it hasn't delivered what you wanted it to deliver.

But we've got nothing to hide, the information is all out there, it's all public, it's audited to the hilt. Our regulator, even today on the finances have published a report on the finances of the company and all the companies. So, there isn't anything to hide there. I should say that that document isn't written for shareholders, because we don't have any shareholders, that document is written for the public at large, but it's written in a way that meets the needs of the UK Corporate Code of Governance, to make sure that we're doing it as accurately and as professionally and openly as possible. So that is a key area.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Alun. I think the action plan that's there and what you've heard from the discussion, I think that gives you a pretty clear idea of what is needed. I don't think it has to be perfect because people might have different opinions. I very much welcome the fact, if you want to test it out on your own panels, great. I mean the more people who can get to do that, Water Voice isn't here to test things on behalf of companies.

Alun Shurmer: I appreciate that, Rhodri, my point was there was frustration in the room that another one was being set up, but we don't have access in the way that CCW and others have access to this group. I don't want the group to believe that we are doing that out of choice, that is not our choice, that's CCW's choice.

CCW Chair: Yeah, absolutely and because that's what this group is here for. So, we've got an action plan, and you've committed to come back to the group in a month's time with what I would, if I was sitting in your shoes, come back with my best effort of what I think people want. Just to give one clear example on that, Ofwat is included, there's nothing there, you know how much of a hot potato remuneration is, it's got to be there, be honest about it, be upfront about it.

It may not be perfect; some people might want more. If it's a question of more information, it's easy to do that, as you say, the annual report and the six-monthly reports are there, and you can signpost to those. But getting a concise – the example that comes to my mind is what Carmarthenshire County Council send me with my Council Tax bill - it tells me where the money goes.

Alun Shurmer: Which is something that we've done for many years, Rhodri.

CCW Chair: But clearly your customers are telling you they want it in a different format, and it needs to be clearer. So, I think we can draw a line under that there, move on, see where you get to in a month's time and we will obviously liaise with the Water Voice community to discuss that. We now need to move on to the second question, and this is one that has been prioritised through the pre-task and briefing session because community members expressed a clear view around concern about pollution in local rivers and coastal waters and wanted evidence that higher bills would actually fund improvements. So, can I turn to Community Member 4 please to ask the next question?

Community member 4: Yeah, hi, and thanks for letting me have the opportunity to talk about this. I explained earlier that I live in the Wye Valley very close to the River Wye in Monmouth, and in fact it's just a few metres away from our house. We moved here about 18 years ago, and I was very proud to live so close to a beautiful river that we used for recreational purposes, but also for lovely walks. I moved from Bristol, so lots of friends and family used to come and visit and we very much enjoyed the River Wye.

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I then had children and they enjoyed also paddling, canoeing, paddle boarding, but sadly in the last five years I have stopped my children and stopped using the river in that way myself, and also stopped walking alongside it as well, because I find it so sad and depressing due to the level of pollution that we witness. I know other members in this community also mentioned about the concern about pollution of where they visit it and their recreational point, so not just rivers but the coast as well.

Dŵr Cymru produced a factsheet, which recorded a two-star environmental rating for 2024, and obviously our bills have increased, but I believe that the rating has stayed the same. So which physical improvements will reduce sewage spills so that we can start being proud and enjoy our rivers and our watercourses again?

When is this going to be done by and how, and will your results against Ofwat's measures show that higher bills are making a difference, because that is another thing that grieves me is that my bill has gone up quite significantly and even to my neighbours that live just a few miles away, who have a different water company in the Forest of Dean, we are paying a lot more for our water bills, and they have increased greatly in the last two years. Thank you.

CCW Chair: Thank you for that, Community Member 4, back to you Roch and the team to decide how you'd like to answer?

Roch Cheroux: Thank you Rhodri, Community Member 4, and everyone. We completely understand the frustration of our customers in terms of environmental performance. We know that being at two stars is not good enough, and we are working hard to get a better outcome in terms of environmental performance.

As I said before, I started in January. Since January we've completely restructured the entire business, completely from top to bottom. This is to help us to deliver now within this regulatory period that goes between 2025 and 2030, as much improvement as possible, in a number of different areas, including environmental performance.

There's another part of what we're doing today which is really important, and that's preparing for our future for the periods that are going to start from 2030. We know that if we look back, in the last 30 years, the economic regulators have kept the bills as low as possible in the water industry. The consequence of this is that the economic regulators completely forbid investment into the asset. So, we are today in the situation where a lot of investment has not been made in the last 30 years to keep the bills as low as possible.

And now we are in the situation where, considering all of the damage to the environment, the economic regulators decided that the bills needed to be increased, so that we can invest into the environment.

We're going to give you some very concrete examples, but that's really important that we also make sure that starting from 2030, we have the conversation with all our customers, with all our stakeholders about what is the priority. Because investment is not going to catch up on the situation in the next 12, 24, 36 months. It's going to take time to catch up on this 30 years of underinvestment.

That's across the board, in the water industry, in England and Wales, so we're working hard. I can tell you that we're measuring the performance every month, every month there is a performance meeting of the Executive.

I can tell you that we're starting to see the green shoots, so we're starting to see the number of pollution incidents reducing, we're starting to see the number of overflows reducing. Now, we also know that we're not where we should be, and we continue to work hard on this. I'm going to hand over to Steve now, who is going to give you a bit more detail.

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Steve Wilson: Thanks Roch and thanks Community Member 4. Look, the River Wye is one of those iconic rivers, not just for us in our operating area, but in the whole if the UK. I'll come on to the two-star performance, the EPA rating. This is a mechanism that the EA, the Environment Agency, and Natural Resources Wales use to take a number of performance measures around the environment.

Our sewage works, compliance, how the sewage works are performing properly, the number of pollution incidents. Are we disposing of our sewage sludge properly? They have a basket of measures which they set targets on companies to see improvements. You get a red, amber, green rating against those measures. The important thing for us is that we've started to reduce the number of pollution incidents, that is against the backdrop of they had been going up just as Roch had mentioned.

Our Achilles heel, the problem for us of getting out of two star and heading for three star and better, is serious pollution incidents - that is our big problem area. And that comes down to the fact that because we have so many iconic rivers, so many gorgeous beaches in our operating area, so many protected areas, national parks, any leak of sewage in one of those protected environments, scores very highly because it's a much worse impact.

So, we've got a number of pumped sewers which have been bursting, and they've been the cause of those serious incidents. We are replacing a whole load of them in this five-year period, all the ones which have caused serious pollution incidents are in the programme to be replaced. Those of you who are from Bridgend, will know probably in the local press, the issues we've had down near Kenfig Burrows with a particularly badly performing pumping main, which has kept bursting.

It's 16 kilometres long, we are replacing the whole lot of that, all the way through Tata Steel and all the way past Kenfig Burrows. But that has been a real Achilles heel for us from a pollution and performance point of view. Onto the rivers point, there are two things that play here in your question, Community Member 4. One of the reasons why so many of our [3]SAC, Special Areas of Conservation, rivers in Wales have been failing their standards, have been because of phosphorus pollution. Phosphorus comes from agriculture, but it also comes from wastewater.

On the River Wye, we are typically about 30% of the problem. We did a huge amount of work in the last five-year period on the English part of the Wye, so Hereford, places like Leominster, Ross-on-Wye all got phosphorous removal plants. We also did one at Monmouth. But we're now working in the upper Wye, we're working in the Welsh part of the Wye, putting more phosphorus removal plants in. In fact, we're spending about £400m or £500m on phosphorous removal in the Wye and the Usk alone in this five-year period.

Back to Community Member 9's point about comparing things, the last five-year period we spent £350m in total for our whole environmental improvement programme, this five-year period 2025 to 2030, that's £1.2b. A massive step up. The other part you mentioned is about bathing water and swimming. Rivers in the UK are not normally treated as bathing waters, we don't take the bacteria out. What we do with our rivers is make sure they have good ecological status that fish can swim, otters, all the pond life and river life we'd like to see - that's a different standard to a bathing water. If you want bathing water quality, you need to disinfect that water, you need to kill all the bacteria, and that's not a normal approach in UK rivers.

We've got a third of the UK's Blue Flag beaches on 15% of the UK's coastline, but only 5% of the customers to pay for all that investment, all that power for UV disinfection, all those running costs. One of the reasons why Severn Trent have a lot lower bills, they don't have any coastline, they don't have any SAC rivers. Clearly, Welsh Water customers are picking up the tab for cleaning up and looking after a much higher quality amenity and environment that we all benefit from, and that is a big cost to us.

[3] SAC Special Area of Conservation

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Can I just stop you there, Steve, we need to move on. Or just 30 seconds?

Steve Wilson: So, pollution reduction is really important to us, that's going to take a little bit of time. The phosphorus issues in the SAC rivers are being tackled, and we will start to see those rivers improve. Certainly, the wastewater content will be being dealt with. But the storm overflow point that Roch mentioned is a long-term problem for us and is going to take many years to turn that around. I hope that helps?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Steve. Okay Nicky, back to you to see what panel members make of the responses they've heard.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much Rhodri and thank you to the team for those fantastic responses. I now want to go back first of all to Community Member 4 who posed a question and then to the wider group to hear your thoughts. So, Community Member 4, do you want to come in?

Community Member 4: Yeah, first of all I'm really glad to hear that so much money is being spent in improving our waterways throughout Wales. Yes, I do understand about the swimming, it was more of a comment on walking along the rivers, seeing the dead wildlife, seeing dead fish very frequently in the river. And chatting to local fishermen as well that use it and seeing yourself how much it's declined. One thing I would like, which we have discussed before in our group, is about your monitoring and where you monitor. I think sometimes, again I use the word "suspicion" and unfortunately, I do understand where you're coming from, Alun, you mentioned it earlier about the water companies have got to – they're fighting against an image that we all have of you, especially with recent documentaries and news articles, the TV programme Dirty Business, which enraged a lot of us, including myself.

So, I do understand that you've got to fight that battle, but there is a suspicion on where you do the monitoring? Also, the relationship also with obviously in England the Environment Agency, but Natural Resource Wales, about you being self-regulated, certainly in England, but it all has an impact of somebody who lives on the border. So yeah, just regarding the monitoring I'd like some more information about - who picks your monitoring sites and where you monitor to see the improvement as well, because there's no point monitoring just before a sewage outlet or other places along the river. So that's my comment, but thank you for your response.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 9, your hand's up, would you like to come in just now?

Community Member 9: Yes, there was a lot of emphasis put on timescales and how challenging, and how big, the problems that they have are. I think from where I'm sitting, we all understand that some of these things are not an overnight fix and we're not expecting that. But I think that what we're looking for is incremental improvements, so if we can see, like we started getting some figures there, what were the sewage figures last year, how much leaks, what were the different types of pollution, how much? What was the figure last year, what was the figure before? And what we're looking for is incremental improvements.

We understand things are going to take 12, 24, 36 months like we said, but I think there were elements there that were, it was almost like, "Oh, the problem's too big, we can't show you improvements short-term, so we're not going to give you any information." That's not good enough, we want, even if it's small incremental improvements, we want to see things heading in the right direction, and with no data, I don't think that's good enough, it's not good enough.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks Community Member 9, it's all about milestones for improvement for you there. Community Member 3?

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Community Member 3: I just wanted to clarify something that Roch said - did I understand correctly that basically the regulators have been responsible for the underinvestment over the last several years in infrastructure? Is that what you said?

TMcK Facilitator: [4]Yes, Community Member 3, that's correct.

Community Member 3: [3]Okay, that's very interesting. In looking at all the various, I've read more reports from Welsh Water than I ever thought I would, and I have been forming the opinion that you've been undercharging us all these years, which is a stupid thing to say, but maybe not. Going forward, how much control do you have over what you're able to do with the money you've got? How much control do you have over how you spend the money that you collect and how much you collect, is that something that's pretty much dictated from above, from Ofwat or some other regulator?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, Community Member 3, I'm sure they can come back to you on that one, I'm pretty sure it is set by Ofwat, but there are special measures that can be put in place, so there's probably a bit of a conversation to be had at the end, if that's all right? Community Member 10, do you want to come in there?

Community Member 10: Yeah, I think some of the figures for me, we all know that Ofwat fined Welsh Water and put an enforcement package in place for £44.7m, and then you've promised to spend a further £889m on storm overflows between 2025 and 2030, so that's a considerable amount of money. So, it would be really good to know how that money is going to be spent in improving the situation. I live by the coast myself, and I have seen things deteriorate and I'm not happy going into the sea anymore.

I think it would be really good to understand out of that £889m and the further £44.7m you've promised to spend on this particular topic, how is that going to be spent? Are you going to meet some of those promises by the 2030 deadline? You said you're going to spend that £889m between 2025 and 2030, so I'd like to know how that is progressing because we're already obviously a year into that.

TMcK Facilitator: That's great Community Member 10, thank you. So again, it's about milestones, it's about understanding spending, it's about understanding infrastructure and these incremental differences that that potentially makes, thank you. Community Member 1, do you want to come in?

Community Member 1: Thank you to Steve for that explanation, it's actually quite nice to hear some kind of really clear examples of how spending's being stepped up, how things are improving. A couple of things came across in the response there from Dŵr Cymru, one is it sounds like there's been this kind of restriction in bills, so they've been underfunded for many years, essentially. The other thing is, it sounds like in the past there have been some very poor infrastructure choices because we've always had wonderful rivers and beaches, why has infrastructure been designed in a way that sewage can overflow into them?

I understand that those are problems of the past, but I would be interested to know what's changed in the way that the whole sector is being managed that means that that's not going to continue happening in the future?

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to share my screen now, because I'm conscious of time and we've covered an awful lot. So again, I'll share where we've got to and Alisa has been working in the background recording everything as we go. So, for Q2, we heard the response and again the mass restructuring since January to deliver as much improvement as possible in areas including environmental performance.

[4] Confirming Roch said this earlier on.

Session transcript

Past regulations have inhibited environmental investment across the board not just with Dŵr Cymru but other water companies too. Currently making up for past underinvestment at pace, was the message.

Some recent decreases in sewage overflows and pollution incidents, still a long way to go. So "green shoots" recovery was the term used, which a lot of you I think took a lot of confidence from, understanding what the positive things are that are in motion. And obviously they're intending to work hard on this.

They're looking to help remove agricultural run-off from waterways, and planting phosphorous removal plants.

So, there's clearly a structure in place, and I think Community Member 1, you mentioned it was great to hear a little bit more about that.

And to the future, from 2030 onwards, they will hold meetings with stakeholders, customers, and other parties to ensure future investment aligns with customer priorities.

They are going to replace faulty pumping mains across the system over the next five years, leading to fewer pollution incidents.

Between 2025 and 2030, £1.2b has been allocated to environmental improvement efforts. Again, this is much larger than in previous years.

Storm overflows are very much a long-term problem and will take many years to overcome and a huge amount of infrastructure required to be replaced to make that happen.

The responses from the community are as follows, and again I'll come back to you in about two minutes' time, and you can let me know if we need to improve on these.

You want to clarify and clearly explain current monitoring strategies and locations of these monitors. Explain who selects the sites of these monitors, is it the Environment Agency, is it Welsh Government, Welsh Water, how does that work?

Provide regular updates of key environmental figures to customers. Incremental improvements are great, let's hear about them. Provide clear timescales, provide infrastructure investments that are all going to lead to this, bring it into one place for people to understand more about that. They want figures for pollution incidents, sewage overflows.

Demonstrate how these allocated environmental funds will be spent, and if you will reach your proposed deadlines and when.

Again, I'll come to Community Member 6, he can start us off, is there anything missing here, Community Member 6, that you want to see added, and then we'll continue round the group for another couple of minutes?

Community Member 6: I wouldn't say "missing" actually, it's basically in addition to what you said. So, for example, in the "We did" section, when we've said something like there have been some recent decreases in sewage overflows, it's still a long way to go. What I'd like to see are the actual facts and percentages attached to that. So how many percentage decreases in overflows are there? What do other water authorities, how do we compare to their results?

I mean people have said this like Community Member 10 all the way through, it's comparative results that are important here, not just saying, "We've made some progress in, we'd like to do more of this." It's actually saying, "Since last time, we've decreased sewage overflows by 14% and we project that they will be decreased by another 20% by January 1st," you know, whatever it is, so that we can actually [a] compare it to other water authorities and [b] compare it to last year's

performance with this authority.

TMcK Facilitator: Does anyone else want to jump in just now on what we've got on the screen and what's been said so far? So, I think the community, I'm taking it we're quite happy with what we've achieved in terms of setting actions?

For the transcript, there's a few nodding heads on my screen just now. I'm just going to go to Rhodri now then, and we can take things forward from there.

CCW Chair: Before I turn back to Roch and Steve, can I just say one thing about how bills have been set and continue to be set in England and Wales. You know, the water companies are responsible for submitting their own business plans to Ofwat, it's the companies who go to Ofwat saying, "This is what we need," for their infrastructure improvements. Ofwat then determine if there's sufficient evidence there to support that and can see value for money for customers and make a decision as to do the companies get what they want?

If companies don't think they're getting what they want, they can appeal to the Competition and Markets Authority who can overrule Ofwat's decision, and companies have certainly done that in several cases over the past years. So, I just wanted to put that out there that that's how it works. Companies ask Ofwat for money, Ofwat decides whether it's a reasonable ask or not.

Okay, so back to Roch and Steve then for a response to what you've heard from the panel members, please?

Roch Cheroux: Thanks, Rhodri. I just wanted to confirm what you've just said, so that's exactly how it works. Therefore, what Ofwat accept as a level of revenue for the company is what is then translated into a tariff for our customers. So, we know that tariffs have been kept very low and I'm more than happy for that to continue. But the consequence is that there's a direct link between investment and levels of tariff, so we all need to be very aware with that. I'm going to leave it to Steve to talk about the monitoring strategy because I feel that's important that we talk about that.

In terms of providing regular updates, it goes with the first discussion that we had, so it means that what we were discussing was the pie chart to explain the facts and figures but actually understand that there's a request to expand that to more in line with the data. Just for everyone's information, all of this environmental performance data is absolutely transparent, this is published not only by us but also be [5]NRW and by the Environment Agency, and by Ofwat every year, or every six months in some cases.

So basically, the information is completely public, with translation of improvement or decreased comparison with previous years. But that's something we can also work on, packaging it in a slightly different way, in a reduced way to make it more accessible to our customers.

That's the same for the third point, which is about how do we make sure that you've got the information, and you know where the money is going to the different projects? Again, this is information that is already available on our website, you can see the information, it's a very specific project and how the money is being allocated but understand the request for a more accessible way to do it for you.

I'm going to hand over to Steve to clarify the monitoring regime.

Steve Wilson: Thanks, Roch. So, from a monitoring point of view, yes there's operator self-monitoring but it's incredibly heavily audited and controlled by NRW and [6]EA.

Their own data, they also do their own monitoring of rivers and beaches as well to make sure that all these things align.

[5] NRW Natural Resources Wales
[6] EA Environment Agency

Session transcript

One of the things that we're doing in Wales, which is different to England, is doing an environmental harm assessment up and downstream at every one of our storm overflows, so that we can actually work out which ones are causing environmental damage and prioritise those first.

Now, that's a really good thing, because we'll have real good environmental data, but it will also be very uncomfortable for us because it will point to another data set which says we have a number of storm overflows which are causing environmental harm. But they're the ones we're going to prioritise.

On the point of the investment, the £899m we're spending on storm overflows, yes we will definitely get that spent in this five-year period and the extra £44m that you referred with Ofwat, but you know, that is only tackling 147 of our 2,300 storm overflows. So actually, the cost to every customer, if we were to rebuild every one of our storm overflows and get them out of the system, would be £10,000 a customer.

We've got some of the most storm overflows because we all live in Wales and we know how much more it rains here. Interestingly, we also have one of the lowest levels of sewer flooding, you're much less likely to suffer flooding in wet weather in your home in Wales from the sewer network than you are in somewhere else in the East of England who might not have as many storm overflows.

So, we don't want them, we want to get rid of them, but we don't want to exacerbate flooding, and what we want to try and do is tackle them in a way that our customers can afford. So, we're going to prioritise tackling the ones causing the highest harm first, and we're going to work through that over a number of years. But the storm overflow challenge for us in Wales is about protecting the rivers. Our measure of success will be if we see more of our rivers in Wales meeting good ecological status quicker than we see in England.

That's the important thing, 44% of rivers in Wales meet good ecological status. But that's not enough, we want more. That contrast of 14% in England, but that's going to be our measure of success, can we move that further up? And just on Community Member 10's point, bathing waters in Wales are better than they have ever been. More designated bathing waters are meeting excellent, but it's a hard challenge with climate change and the storm overflow problem, we're going to have to work even harder to protect that bathing water. I hope that helps?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Steve. I think we're on time and unless Nicky tells me differently, we're ready to move on to the Q&A session?

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, absolutely, Rhodri, so we've got loads of great points here, we've captured most of them on the slide, and we'll share those at the end of the next few days.

CCW Chair: Okay, great. So, we've got three questions I think to try and get through in the time we've got left. Brevity, once again, is very much appreciated. The first question is coming from Community Member 3, over to you, Community Member 3.

Community member 3: I'll just initially say thank you very much, Steve, for all the information you've provided for us. I've seen lots of compilations of comparative costs to consumers for the water and sewage bills in different regions in different water authorities and note with consternation that Dŵr Cymru is always amongst the highest, often only second or third highest. So why are the water bills so much higher here than elsewhere?

CCW Chair: Okay, thank you Community Member 3. I don't know who wants to answer that, I'll leave it to you to choose?

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Roch Cheroux: Thanks Community Member 3, for your question. I'm going to start and then Kit will complement. As we said, the bills are completely related to the cost of operating the assets that we've got. I'll give you an example. In Wales, we've got 840 wastewater treatment plants. If you go to a place like London, there's about 40 wastewater treatment plants. So, you can see that the number of assets that we have to operate for the small population of Wales is a lot higher compared to other parts of England. And that is a direct relation to the tariff that we have.

Kit Wilson: I think Roch summarised it well. The point I would add is probably the pre-privatisation and post-privatisation nuance to this. So, prior to privatisation, all of the wastewater that was coming out of the South of Wales was essentially going out into the sea. And post-privatisation there was a huge programme of work to then treat it to ensure that didn't happen, so the building of two huge treatment works for that purpose, and that moved the average bills for Welsh Water from pre that investment of being one of the cheapest in the sector and post that investment, that moved us up to one of the highest in the sector.

Steve touched on it earlier, if you use the Severn Trent example with no coastline, that investment wasn't required, so if you're looking comparably you need to just take into account the amount of investment that is required and the amount of coastline that is within the geography and when that investment was needed post privatisation.

Community Member 3: Can I ask a follow-on question then?

TMcK Facilitator: Of course, yeah, Community Member 3, you can come back in.

Community Member 3: I did think that Steve had in part answered my question earlier. However, the next question is, okay, that was a long time ago, is part of the reason our water bills are so expensive is the debt incurred at that time, is that something we're still paying off, is that what's happened?

Kit Wilson: One point to add to that and Roch please come in if you want to add something, I think the other factor you need to take into account here is the amount of customers – and this was kind of touched on earlier by Steve, the amount of customers that value is spread across. So, all of that infrastructure obviously needs to be built, but it also needs to be run, maintained, upgraded every year, so it's not just a one-off cost which would be debt, which then is paid off over time.

You've then got the infrastructure costs to maintain, to run, the resource cost to do that, so that's spread across a far fewer number of customers than if you take into account say the large number of 10 million customers in the Thames region, versus the 3 million customers in the Welsh Water region.

So, the nuance of the amount of customers of those bills and the investment is spread across, is also a factor. Just in terms of debt, we have one of the lowest [7]gearing levels in the industry. So, what that means is, how much of the value of the organisation is leveraged against debt, we're around 60% and that is at a lower threshold than others and is a metric that we commit to maintaining as part of our ongoing running of the organisation.

Community Member 3: I did read a report about your admirable attention to your credit rating, so well done on that.

Roch Cheroux: Community Member 3, in answer to your question, that's exactly how it works, so it's simply the tariff that we're collecting every year is not sufficient to fund the asset that we are investing in, so we have to borrow money. So, actually, what is in the tariff is not a straight reflection of the asset that we invest, but it's a reflection of the depreciation of the assets that we've got.

7. Gearing level measures how much of its business operations and capital are funded through borrowed debt compared to shareholder equity.

So, when we've got a programme of investment that is about £6b in a further payout where we'll be collecting about maybe £3b or £4b, then we need to invest £2b, and that is what is going to come through the bills for the next 10 or 15 years. So that's exactly how it works.

Community Member 10: So just a question for you Roch, directly, how much do you see our bills – can you see them going up in the way they are now? Because it's unsustainable for us as families giving the cost of living at the moment. I appreciate money needs to be invested in Welsh Water and our infrastructure and improving the environment and everything, but really, we're a family of four, two of us work full-time, and we're finding it really difficult. I just want to know what are you going – do you foresee that this is going to continue for the next 10 or 15 years, when is this going to stop?

Roch Cheroux: Yeah, that is an absolutely critical question. My answer to that is we know that our customers are doing tough, and we know that affordability is an issue for a number of our customers. That's exactly why for the next regulatory period for the next period, and Rhodri was saying, every five years we go to the regulator and we say, "This is our business plan for the next five years, this is how much money we need to collect from the tariff." We don't want to go there without engaging with our customers because we know that affordability is absolutely critical. So, what we're doing, there is a piece of work that is ongoing that is our strategy and it will be transferred into a plan that we're going to take to the regulator in 2028.

The way we do this plan is by engaging with customers and the discussion that we have with customers is, "Well, these are all the things we have to do. Now, we know that if we do everything, that's not going to be affordable, so what is affordable for you, and within that envelope, where is it that we need to put the priority?" And that's absolutely critical because we want to do things that our customers want us to do, we're not here to impose things on customers, so we have to have this discussion with customers about the level of affordability, "How much can you pay on your bill?" And then from there say, "Okay, this is how much investment we can make."

Then when you know this is how much investment we can make, then we need to have a conversation with the community saying, "Okay, this means that we can invest here, here and there, are you happy with that? If you're not happy with that, where should we invest the money?" This is exactly the discussion that we're having currently with the customers in the community.

We've had a number of forums, engagement groups across the operating area. We've engaged with 6,000 customers so far on exactly these sorts of questions, and that's going to continue beyond 2027, so that when we go to the regulator in 2028 we've got a plan that is actually something that we have discussed in detail with our customers, and that's a plan that's affordable to our customers.

Community Member 10: I understand it's very difficult for you to make decisions, but they really are having an impact on people like us, people who are working full-time, we're not on the same salaries as you, so it's a very different picture for us, isn't it? That's our reality, and I will go on to the second question, but my next question will be about affordability. So yeah, thank you for answering that, but yeah, it is a concern and I'm sure it's a concern to many other people who are listening in and many of your customers as well.

Roch Cheroux: Just to be crystal clear, we know that affordability is a concern for all our customers, and I can tell you that's absolutely front of mind for all of the decisions that we're making.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 6, would you like to come in now?

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Community Member 6: Yes, following on from what Roch said there, really a point of information. You've all mentioned quite a lot about the efforts you've been making to consult with the customers in various ways, and of course that's a very laudable thing to do. On a point of information, is that analysis, setting up panels and setting up questionnaires and all those things, is all that done in-house or do you employ third party consultants, external consultants to do that type of exercise?

Alun Shurmer: So that is part of my remit, and we have a mix to be honest with you. The vast majority or the work is commissioned independently, so that we can make sure that we have an independent view of what is being said, so that we aren't setting the questions in a way that will be answered in a certain way. We make sure that everything is in-line with the Market Research Society, so the principles that are followed are absolutely kosher, if that makes sense, to make sure we aren't leading the questions.

But the huge exercise that we've just undertaken for the strategy developed over the summer, we have included moderated workshops with 50 or 60 customers at a time. We've had largescale surveys over 1,000 customers to get a quantitative response to make sure it's reflective of the wider customer base. We try to get out to harder to reach customers, so if they are disabled or infirm or anything, there's a way of doing the different methodologies that can be used.

But then there was one element where we did more of a mass consultation, we wanted everybody to have a view if they so wanted, which we promoted on social media and through our events and summer shows at the Royal Welsh Show, Pembrokeshire Show all those sorts of things.

So, we wanted to get out into the communities to get people to give us those responses. Now, we did that ourselves, we commissioned a company to help build it, to capture it, but what we've done, and it's to make sure that everything's analysed accurately, then we've not just had the independent review, we've had a peer review to make sure that the messages that we are taking from it, are of true reflection of the multiple sources that we've used. So, we've tried to be not just open with the consultation, but to make sure that it is as robust as possible.

There are, however, other aspects of the work that we do where we do things in-house. I'll give you an example, earlier in the year we had a boil notice, which meant the customers in the Maerdy area of the Rhondda Valley had to boil their water for a few days because of a problem at one of the treatment works when we were investigating it and then fixing it. This is only the second time in 15 years that this has happened.

So, we wanted to make sure that straight after the event that we captured the feedback of our customers. In order to commission it independently, it could have taken us a good few weeks to do that, so we do have a tool that we do manage in-house, which allows us to put surveys together very quickly and a quick analysis on it, so that we are able to capture that information quickly. But we do not use that for anything of a regulatory purpose or anything else, it's just to give us additional insight.

Community Member 6: The reason I mentioned that in particular, I used to work for a local authority which will be nameless, who had a particular issue that they wanted to deal with, with their residents. And on a freedom of information request some 12 months later, it found that they'd spent more on consulting with their residents and the process of consultation than it would have been to fix whatever the issue was. So, you're quite right to stress it because that balance between having independent surveys and not in-house ones, so not spending so much on external organisations that it costs you more than the thing itself.

Alun Shurmer: That's exactly the balance we're trying to fix, because we all want quick turnaround information so we can make quick decisions on things as well.

Session transcript

But if they are things that say for regulatory purposes, price reviews, government policy matters, then we need to have the rigor to make sure that it is accurately reflected and it can't be picked over for being skewed in any direction. And we do make those publicly available on our website as well.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm going to come to Community Member 1 just quickly and then we're going to move on to the next question. So, Community Member 1, if you want to jump in and let us know your thoughts?

Community Member 1: Yeah, so I had a comment first of all really, rather than a question, which is from what I've heard, I don't quite understand why we've had such a sudden jump in bill prices in the last few years? Like our infrastructure has been much the same for 20 years or more, bills have stayed very steady for a while and then they've jumped very suddenly. It's not entirely clear to me why that has jumped so much. I think that exacerbates this issue of affordability for a lot of people because they have seen such a large increase in a relatively short space of time.

The other thing I want to mention, just bring up in terms of obviously Dŵr Cymru need more revenue to do important work, and one of the things we've been discussing in our community is metering.

I just wonder whether that's something that's being looked at as a way of perhaps bringing in a bit more revenue by increasing the number of metered customers, or whether that's something that would theoretically increase more revenue without having to put everyone's bills up and perhaps make things a bit more fair in terms of what everyone's bills look like?

Roch Cheroux: So, a very quick response, I'll start with metering, you're absolutely right, it makes it more fair for everyone because you actually pay only for what you consume. Now, in terms of revenue, it doesn't change the equation because the revenue us capped, so if we get 100% of our customers metered, it means that everyone will pay exactly what they consume.

On the bill increase, the bill increase is related to the investment programme. So, in 2024 the team went to the regulator and said, "The situation is really not good enough and this is how much investment we need to do to make sure that we can keep the system running." And the regulator accepted this and the consequence was an increase. Now, it's been accepted in 2025, and the investment programme has started in 2025, for the period of 2025 to 2030, but that's a consequence of the larger investment programme, we're talking about a £4.2b investment programme, compared to something which was in the order of magnitude of about £700m or £800m in the previous period.

TMcK Facilitator: Rhodri, we're going to have time for one more Q&A question, so if we want to move on to that?

CCW Chair: Yes, Community Member 10, this is your question, I think?

Community member 10: Yeah, I think Roch has sort of covered it. I think going back to people who are feeling the pressure of cost of living, what are you going to do to help people who are struggling to pay their bills but do not qualify for your current support package?

I think I've had a better understanding tonight, just quickly, of why you've had to increase or bills, and I fully appreciate it. I think it's really important for the future, for our future generations to have got a system that works. But I think for me, somebody who's working really hard full-time, I just want to know, I'm struggling with my bills as well, but no one's going to help me. Have you got any plans to help? I know I'm asking you to invest in one hand and asking you to reduce my bills in another, which doesn't make any sense, but is there anything that you can do to help?

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Kit Wilson: Thank you for the question Community Member 10. I think the first thing I would say is we absolutely recognise the challenge of paying our bills, the challenge of paying our increased bills, and particularly when you put that in the context of everything else that's challenging people's finances - take the energy costs that we're all seeing in our private lives at the moment.

We have a specialist support service within Dŵr Cymru which is aimed at supporting people with all challenges in life, not just those that qualify for a social tariff. If you remember the last session that we had back in April, we talked a lot about people that were eligible for social tariffs who are on state benefits and how we support customers in that space. Our specialist support services are set up to support all, and actually CCW recognises it as one of the strongest in the sector in that regard.

We have a dedicated team, and they undertake a number of functions, and I'll just bring that to life in terms of the support they offer. So, we have something called "Cymuned" which is Welsh for community, and it is the only type of support in the sector of this category where we offer short-term financial support for customers that aren't in receipt of benefits.

So, you don't have to be in the bracket that would apply to get a social tariff, but maybe there is a challenge that is hitting you in your private life, maybe there's an illness, you've been made redundant, maybe there's just another cost that is bearing down on your income. And that tariff allows you to have a three-month payment window, in effect, a payment holiday on paying your bills. Because we recognise that everyone has those types of challenges at certain points during their life.

We also have a couple of support schemes with people that are struggling to pay. We have something called "Low Value Plans", so where we've got a customer that maybe just is struggling to pay their bill for any reason within their working life, we will allow them to go on what we call a "nominal plan" so it will just be a nominal amount each month, we'll agree that for a set period to allow them the comfort and the space to be able to get back to a place where they can pay their bills.

We have a debt removal or a debt wiping scheme, where if customers had been building up arrears over time, if we can get them back paying an agreed amount between us, we'll actually after six months if they can stick to that payment, we'll wipe off half their arrears. If they then stick to it with us for the next six months, so for 12 months in total, we'll clear the whole arrears for them.

In the last year, we cleared £3m of customer debt through that scheme, that was up a million pounds on last year.

Community members 10: I think it's that middle income people that are really struggling, so for people who are on big salaries, it's not a problem. For people who are on low salaries, it's not a problem because they're getting all the help. It's the people here in the middle, you know, that are trying to make ends meet. So, I think please consider them in all your plans because we're the ones that are being hit.

Kit Wilson: We have a huge customer metering programme that we are – so last year we rolled out 160,000 meters for customers across Wales. On average, customers that move on to the meter will save £100 a year on their bills. So, we're proactively installing meters across Wales and then giving customers a comparison on how much they would save if they switched to that meter bill. If customers have a meter, but are still finding their usage is high, we then offer free water efficiency advice and visits, so we can come and visit your home and work with you, give you water-saving devices to actually lessen the amount of water that you use or give you advice on how you can lessen use.

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Because we fully appreciate some people may already have a meter, but it might be that for whatever reason they need to use quite a lot of water. So, then it's about the efficiency. The last thing I was going to say in terms of that service is we recognise that lots of challenges people have in their lives won't always be linked to their water bill and to their water use, actually it will be linked to something else that's going on. So, our specialist support team have a partnership with over 186 different organisations where we will refer customers to.

Because the reason they're maybe struggling to pay their water bill may be linked to something that is completely different, maybe it's a housing challenge, maybe it's mental health, maybe it's debt advice through StepChange.

So, we have a whole raft of partnerships that we have, and we have the Community Team that work within that specialist support team out in the community, so we'll be at events, in communities, in community centres promoting those services, referring to those partners, signing people up to either social tariffs, getting them signed up to a meter, looking at water efficiency advice and that whole raft.

So, we completely understand that that support isn't just needed for those that are in receipt of benefits, it is that, as you've described, that squeezed middle as well. So hopefully that's answered your question?

Community member 10: I think the meter thing is really interesting, because you're talking about smart meters as well aren't you, for water you said, is that something that's – because that would help me as somebody who's … Because I've got a meter at the end of my drive, which I can't really see or get into. Is that something that you're moving forward on quite quickly?

Kit Wilson: Yeah, it's a really good point, actually and it links back to the investment in the sector. So previously all meters that were put into the grounds, going back years where what we classed as dumb meters, so somebody has to manually go out and read those meters, take a reading.

That happens every six months, and every six months you'd find out how much water you use. Well, that's not very useful for you as a customer, you want to know how much you're using regularly, so you can influence that. So, the new meters we've been installing, those 160,000 that we did in the last year and there will be over 700,000 that we roll out in this five-year period, all of those have what we call essentially "smart capability".

So, we will read those at least once a month through a drive by, so we just pick the readings up as we drive around the locality, and we will then be able to show that to customers every month, so you'll be able to see how much usage you've used in the last month. You'll be able to see whether the water efficiency advice that we provided was successful in enabling you to reduce your water use. And really importantly for us, it will help us to detect leaks.

One of the big challenges we have is customers leakage, so leakage in customers' homes which they may not even be aware of, but our new meters have a smart leakage detection device in them, so it will immediately tell us if there is a leak at your property and we can then help you get that fixed. So yes, absolutely that is a key part of that.

Community member 10: How are we prioritising rolling them out, how can we get one of those?

Kit Wilson: There's two ways, you can request it and we will instal it within 30 days. And we are rolling them out proactively across Wales and we've already done a number of areas. We started with the areas that would benefit from it most, and those are the areas that have the greatest level of water shortage.

Because those meters can identify leaks which then helps us fix the leaks which then reduces the water shortage. So that's how they're being rolled out, but you can request one, you can do it online, over the telephone, over the web chat, and we will install it within 30 days. The likelihood is, you'll probably get it within two weeks with our current turnaround times.

Community Member 10: Okay, that's great, thank you.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay folks, very conscious of time. I know we've got an extra question to ask but this has got to be a hard cut-off at 8, so we can look to maybe add that in potentially to the next session and continue that from there. Have any of the community members got anything to ask or add based on what we've heard or are we happy that we've covered what we need to?

Community Member 5: I'd like to know how worried they are about water shortages in the future?

TMcK Facilitator: I don't know if we'll have much time, Community Member 5 to cover that because that's obviously slightly different from the questions that have been asked so far. Just to see if there are any other points to make based on the questions you've asked or heard responses from? No? Okay, I'm going to hand back to Rhodri now.

CCW Chair: Okay. I shall now just sum up what happens next. So, a summary report, fully anonymised transcript and full list of actions will be published within seven working days. And before publication, session members will have the opportunity to request changes such as redaction of any personal information or something you're not quite happy with. Dŵr Cymru for its part will publish an action plan within 28 working days, setting out how it will deliver against the agreed actions and CCW will publish that on its website.

Once it is published, the community members will be sent a link and a short survey asking whether the plan accurately reflects what was agreed, whether it's enough to address the concerns that you've raised, and you'll have 10 days in order to do that.

Following that, CCW will track progress against the action plan through the Water Voice process. So, the whole point of that is to make sure that what we've been doing tonight actually leads to follow through, it's not just a discussion where people get to make comments and nothing ever happens to them.

So can I finally thank you all as community members for the time and effort that you've put into this, the thought, the challenge that you've brought to the table and also for the work that you do in the rest of the time on your membership of Water Voice, that is something that we at CCW think is very important in improving the performance of water companies in England and Wales.

Can I also thank Roch, Kit, Alun, Steve for your participation. I know it can't be a comfortable process sometimes to hear it when people are unhappy with the service provided, but we really appreciate the fact that you, as senior leaders, within the company are prepared to give up the time to come and listen for more time than you'd respond, we appreciate that. But we appreciate the fact that you're prepared to do that, and your willingness to engage, I think, is a key part of the success of this programme.

So, thank you again, and I hope the work of Water Voice continues to be successful in ensuring that your voices as customers and those of customers of every water company in England and Wales continue to get heard. Thank you and a very good evening.

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