Summary report

Autumn Accountability Session with South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water

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

Accountability Session | Tuesday 20th October 2026
Report published: Thursday 29th October

Community members questioned senior representatives from South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water about leakage, value for money and accountability. They want clearer evidence of what is changing, how customers will benefit and when improvements will become visible.

The Action Plan Review focused on making SS11's[1] leakage reduction commitment **understandable and measurable**. The Performance Review challenged the company to identify substantial improvements in service and affordability that customers could expect **over the next 12 months**, rather than relying on explanations of its five-year investment programme.

During the Q&A, members explored **action ownership, AI and digital inclusion** and **businesses' contribution to reducing water demand**. The key discussion points, company responses and customer requests are outlined on the following pages.

Action Plan Review
Q1: Making leakage reduction measurable

Members wanted to understand how much water will be saved, when reductions will be achieved and what they mean for bills and water security.

The company described progress already made. Members sought clearer baselines, interim milestones, investment costs and an accessible tracker showing delivery and any shortfalls.

Performance Review
Q2: Delivering better value for money

Members asked what higher bills would deliver in service and affordability over the next 12 months.

The company said it would provide benchmarked actions across its five investment areas. Members also sought clearer evidence of support outcomes, information about future bills and greater transparency around financial decisions.

Q&A Q3:
Action ownership and accountability

Members wanted named senior ownership and clarity about consequences when commitments are missed.

The company explained executive accountability and links to performance related rewards. It committed to clearer updates showing what has been done, its impact and what comes next.

Q&A Q4:
AI & digital inclusion

Members wanted technological improvements without losing access to human support.

The company said telephone contact would remain available alongside new digital options, with AI supporting staff behind the scenes. Members were reassured and did not request additional actions.

Q&A Q5:
Business water use and shared responsibility

Members wanted reassurance that businesses and larger water users were contributing fairly.

The company described direct engagement and tailored messages through water retailers to reduce demand. Members welcomed these examples and wanted to understand the water savings being achieved.

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 South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water Accountability Session held **on 20th October 2026**. The actions outlined reflect the improvements community members would like South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water to make. These are community-led requests and do not represent confirmed commitments from the company at this stage. South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water will create a formal action plan by **Friday 27th 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.

[1] SS11 - *Reduce leakage by 14% over five years through more sensors, satellite technology, pressure management, no-dig repair trials and the wider metering programme to find and fix leaks faster.*

Q1: Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

What measurable progress and customer benefits will you commit to before 2031 to deliver the 14% leakage reduction?

Context from the session:

Members welcomed the company's explanation of leakage reductions already achieved and its focus on Cambridge Water's water resource pressures. However, percentages and comparisons with the consumption of 56,000 homes did not give them enough context to judge the scale of progress.

They wanted to understand **how leakage is measured, how much water is being saved, which interventions are delivering improvements and whether the expenditure represents good value**.

Members sought a clearer route to completing the work, including interim milestones, customer benefits and what would happen if delivery fell behind.

Regulatory and existing activity context:

SS11[2] is in progress and the company explained that leakage is already subject to regulator agreed targets and annual reporting. Delivered actions also cover investment information and customer-friendly water resource planning, including SS05[2], SS07[2] and SS12[2]–SS13[2]. The quarterly Service Snapshot under **SS09[2] remains delayed, but is in progress**.

The additional request is to connect this existing work to a clear leakage delivery pathway and evidence of customer benefit, rather than restart the programme or repeat general information already provided.

Actions requested by community members:

1A. Make the leakage baseline and proposed savings understandable

Provide a clear, customer friendly explanation of the leakage commitment, including:

- **How leakage is measured**: How total leakage is calculated, including losses not yet located and how company network and customer side leakage contribute to the measure.
- **The scale of water loss and savings**: The starting position, current leakage and intended savings in actual water volumes, alongside the total volume supplied in each operating area.
- **Progress against targets**: How reductions across successive periods relate to one another, so customers can understand the scale of improvement.

Required clarification: SS11[2] commits to a 14% reduction over five years. During the session, the company described targeting a further 20% reduction for the current programme, with around 6% already achieved and 14% remaining. Its formal response should reconcile these descriptions, confirm the baseline used for each percentage and explain the precise delivery period.

1B. Show the route to delivery, with clear interim milestones

Set out how the company intends to achieve the remaining leakage reduction, including:

- **Progress to date**: Which measures have already been implemented and what they have achieved.
- **Future milestones**: What is planned over the next 12 months and the milestones leading to the final target.
- **Contribution of different measures**: Where additional detection teams, mains replacement, metering and new technologies are being used, and what reduction each is expected to deliver.

This should build on the measures already specified under SS11[2], rather than simply restating the existing programme.

Actions requested continued overleaf...

[2]See Slide 9 for a comprehensive overview of all referenced actions

Q1: Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

What measurable progress and customer benefits will you commit to before 2031 to deliver the 14% leakage reduction?"

Actions requested by community members:

1C. Explain the programme's costs, customer benefits and longer-term approach

Explain the overall cost and resourcing of the leakage-reduction programme and how this expenditure benefits customers, including:

- **Costs and benefits:** The total programme expenditure and the expected benefits for water security and customers' bills.
- **Value for money:** How the company balances expenditure against the amount of water saved.
- **Long-term sustainability:** Whether current resourcing can be sustained, how harder or more expensive leaks will be addressed, and when further investment may produce diminishing returns.

Members wanted clarity about the longer-term ambition and how the company will maintain progress as leakage becomes harder to reduce. **The request is for programme-level information, not a detailed expenditure breakdown by staffing, technology and repairs.**

1D. Make progress and any shortfalls visible

Provide an accessible, customer facing leakage tracker showing:

- **Delivery progress**: Planned work, milestones and completed interventions.
- **Results achieved**: Actual leakage reductions and progress against the agreed targets.
- **Response to shortfalls**: Why delivery has fallen behind, what corrective action will follow and the revised route to meeting the commitment.

This should connect with existing performance information and the Service Snapshot under SS09[2], without duplicating general reporting. Ownership and progress updates should align with the arrangements described under Question 3.

Company response and clarification required:

The company accepted the direction of these requests in principle, subject to further review, and offered to share more information about its leakage detection methods.
Specific delivery milestones, overall programme costs, customer-benefit measures and the response to any leakage-target shortfall were not settled during this discussion. These details, together with the reconciliation of the leakage figures, should be addressed in its formal Action Plan response.

[2] See Slide 9 for a comprehensive overview of all referenced actions

Q2: Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

What specific improvements in service and affordability will you commit to over the next 12 months so customers can see better value for money?

Context from the session:

Members welcomed the company's investment explanation, shorter telephone waiting times and affordability support and recognised that some investment protects future services rather than producing immediate benefits.

However, the central challenge remained **what customers will experience over the next 12 months, how substantial those improvements will be and whether affordability will improve alongside service**.

Members wanted benefits explained for the South Staffs region as well as for Cambridge, with specific questions about water treatment and pressure. They also sought clarity on future bill increases, the sustainability of financial support and where dividends are paid.

Existing activity context:

SS01[2] and SS05–SS08[2] already cover spending explanations, investment case studies and local programme information, and are marked **Delivered**. SS20's[2] affordability support programme is also marked **Delivered**, while SS09's[2] quarterly Service Snapshot remains **delayed, but is in progress.**.

The additional requests concern substantial 12-month improvements, evidence that existing support is effective and clearer links between investment and customer outcomes - not introducing the same information or support programmes again.

Actions requested by community members:

2A. Commit to substantial improvements over the next 12 months

Identify specific improvements or meaningful delivery milestones across the five investment areas described: **network reliability and upgrades, water treatment, leakage reduction, customer service and environmental protection**.

For each area, the company should clearly outline:

- **Starting position**: Current performance and the issues being addressed.
- **12-month commitments**: What will change, the interim targets and when improvements will be delivered.
- **Customer benefits**: What practical difference customers should expect to experience.

Members wanted substantial commitments rather than smaller, easily completed tasks. They also sought clarity on **water treatment, telephone waiting times and how poor local water pressure factors into value for money assessments**.

Any leakage commitments should cross reference Question 1 rather than creating a duplicate set.

2B. Explain investment priorities, local benefits and implications for bills

Build on existing investment information by providing a clearer picture of:

- **Investment priorities**: How spending is allocated across the five areas over the next 12 months, what work comes next and why.
- **Local benefits**: What customers in both the South Staffs and Cambridge regions will gain and how immediate improvements are balanced against longer-term investment needs.
- **Future bills**: Whether current investment is expected to moderate future above inflation bill increases or whether further substantial expenditure is anticipated.

The company should distinguish what is known from what remains uncertain, without suggesting that investment automatically results in lower future bills.

Actions requested continued overleaf...

[2] See Slide 9 for a comprehensive overview of all referenced actions

Q2: Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

What specific improvements in service and affordability will you commit to over the next 12 months so customers can see better value for money?

Actions requested by community members:

2C. Demonstrate the effectiveness and sustainability of affordability support

Build on the programme delivered under SS20[2] by explaining **what support customers receive, who is being reached and what difference it makes to their ability to manage bills**.
Set out **the intended reach and targets for the next 12 months**, alongside how support can be sustained if demand increases. Share evidence of the outcomes being achieved through affordability advice, benefit checks, tariffs and hardship assistance, going beyond number of customers supported.

2D. Show whether customers actually experience better value

Demonstrate whether service improvements and affordability support are translating into better customer experiences, including:

- **Customer outcomes**: Changes in satisfaction, affordability and perceptions of value for money.
- **Evidence of improvement**: How operational delivery and customer feedback demonstrate whether the actions are working.
- **Ongoing assessment**: How the company will respond where improvements are not having the intended effect.

The 44% community survey finding[3] should be used as a reference point for that measure, keeping it distinct from other customer indicators.
The Service Snapshot under SS09[2] should help communicate these results, rather than publication alone being treated as evidence of better value.

2E. Make dividend flows and financial responsibilities clearer

Provide an accessible explanation of **where dividends are paid and how financial decisions relate to investment, service improvement and affordability**, building on the existing spending information.
The company clarified that responsibility for service improvement rests with the Managing Director and executive team, while investors own the business. That distinction should be preserved without losing the separate customer request for transparency about where money goes.

Company response and clarification required:

The company agreed to respond to the requests individually and distinguish trackable delivery commitments from explanatory responses. It explicitly said that actions across the five investment areas would include **benchmarks and interim targets**, with customer measures used to assess their impact.
The specific 12-month commitments and targets remain to be supplied. The discussion did not establish a numerical target for improving the 44% result, a promise of lower future bills or a change to dividend policy.

[2] See Slide 9 for a comprehensive overview of all referenced actions
[3] The Water Voice Barometer survey is a monthly survey tracking community members' views of their water company. The referenced statistic reflects the proportion of responding South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water community members reporting that they felt they received value for money. Note of this statistic has also been made in the session transcript.

Q&A: Q3

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Who is accountable when an action misses its deadline or fails to deliver and what consequences follow for the project owner, senior leaders and any performance-related rewards??

Context from the session:

Members wanted identifiable people to take responsibility for Action Plan delivery. The company explained that ultimate accountability rests with the Managing Director, with the Customer Service Director owning the plan and named staff overseeing delivery and updates. **The questioner welcomed this explanation and said their confidence had increased.** The company also acknowledged that focusing updates on the most immediately due actions had made others appear inactive. The discussion therefore focused on making ownership visible and providing clearer updates across the whole plan, including delayed actions and work happening in the background.

Existing activity context:

Named delivery owners and internal reviews were described as already operating. The additional requests concern making these responsibilities visible and improving updates across the current Action Plan, including actions marked **In progress, Delayed – In progress and Not started**.

Actions requested or developed during the discussion:

3A. Make ownership and accountability clear against each action

Make clear who is responsible for delivering each Action Plan commitment, including:

- **Who is accountable:** The individual, senior role or team responsible for delivery, with clear oversight from the company's leadership.
- **How accountability works:** How progress is reviewed and issues are escalated when commitments are at risk.

The appropriate level of detail, including whether specific individuals or roles should be identified, **should be agreed between CCW and the company**. The priority is to make existing responsibilities transparent so customers can understand who is accountable for delivery.

3B. Show delivery, impact and next steps across the whole plan

Adopt the three-part reporting approach proposed by the company for every action:

- **What has been done:** Activity and deliverables completed so far.
- **What impact it has had:** The difference the work has made for customers.
- **What comes next:** Remaining work, timescales and any delays or dependencies.

Updates should cover the entire Action Plan, not just actions closest to their deadlines, so customers can distinguish genuine progress from work that has stalled.

Company response:

The company confirmed existing named ownership and explicitly committed to the three-part reporting approach. In response to the Chair's question about consequences, it explained that overall business outcomes, including customer outcomes, influence senior leaders' continued employment and remuneration, and that poor customer service performance can attract regulatory penalties.

The questioner responded positively, and no further request for clarification of action-specific consequences was raised during the subsequent discussion. The follow-up actions focused on visible ownership and clearer reporting of delivery, impact and next steps.

Q&A: Q4

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

How will you use AI and other new technology to improve customer service without digitally excluding customers who need or prefer human support?"

Context from the session:

Members wanted technological improvements without being forced into digital-only contact. The company described additional self-service options alongside **continued telephone access and human support**.

It explained that AI and connected systems would also help advisers see previous contacts, access relevant information and resolve different enquiries without repeated transfers. The questioner welcomed the choice of contact routes and the balance between innovation and support for customers with different digital preferences. No additional requests were raised when the discussion was opened to the wider group.

Existing activity context:

The customer hub or portal under **SS21**[2] **is marked Delivered**. Accessible communications and website testing under **SS22**[2] **remain Delayed – In progress**.

The assurances given in this discussion do not change those statuses or remove the need to track the outstanding accessibility work.

Company assurances and clarification:

The company described approximately £8.5m of customer service investment over four to five years, including:

- **Choice of contact**: Customers would continue to have access to telephone support alongside digital options and would not be forced to use a chatbot.
- **Better support for advisers**: AI and connected systems would make previous contacts and relevant customer information easier to access, supporting quicker and more effective resolution.
- **More efficient interactions**: The company aims to reduce the average time spent handling an enquiry by around 25%, from the current eight to nine minutes.

The proposed reduction relates to the time spent handling an enquiry, not the waiting time before a call is answered. No specific 12-month deadline for this improvement was agreed.

The company said progress would be communicated through the Service Snapshot under SS09[2], which remains to be delivered.

Additional actions requested by community members:

No additional customer requested actions were identified. The company's assurances should remain recorded, with delivery considered alongside the service commitments developed under Question 2 and the existing accessibility actions, rather than creating duplicate commitments.

[2] See Slide 9 for a comprehensive overview of all referenced actions

Q&A: Q5

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

What are you asking businesses and large water users to do to reduce demand and protect water supplies and how will you make sure they do their fair share alongside households?

Context from the session:

Members wanted reassurance that households were not carrying the responsibility for reducing demand alone. The company described direct contact with developers, golf clubs and racing stables, alongside tailored messages through business water retailers. Businesses had been asked to reduce unnecessary consumption or shift demand to different times. The questioner welcomed these examples but wanted to know **how the company checks that businesses have acted and whether their changes have made a measurable difference**. They also asked whether existing powers were sufficient or further government support was needed.

The company's explanation of existing activity and constraints:

The company said restrictions on household non-essential use were an earlier step, with formal restrictions on business use subject to further conditions, reflecting potential effects on jobs and the economy. It said voluntary business engagement was already happening and would continue regardless of the restriction stage.
It also described some developers being contacted by councils after switching off dust-suppression systems, which the company said had caused them to fall foul of **local guidance**. This was the specific example given of competing requirements around water use.

Further requests raised by the questioner:

5A. Show whether business engagement is producing actual water savings

Explain how the company checks whether businesses and larger water users have changed their behaviour following requests, including:

- **Evidence of action**: Whether businesses have implemented the measures requested.
- **Water savings achieved**: What measurable reduction in demand has resulted, where this can be established.
- **Reliability of the evidence**: Whether business savings can be distinguished from wider reductions in demand, and any limitations in doing so.

The company should distinguish contact activity and reported intentions from actual changes in water use, rather than treating engagement alone as proof of success.

5B. Clarify the powers available and any further support needed

Provide a clear explanation of:

- **Existing powers**: What the company can require of businesses and larger users, when these powers can be used and where it relies on voluntary cooperation.
- **Potential limitations**: Whether existing rules constrain effective demand reduction.
- **Further support**: Whether additional government policy or powers would help secure a fair contribution from larger water users, and what form this might take.

This should explain the company's position without assuming that additional powers are necessary.

Status and required company response:

These follow-up requests were raised at the end of the session and received no further company response. **The company must address both requests explicitly in its formal Action Plan response**, confirming any actions it will take and explaining any requests it does not accept or cannot deliver. They should not be presented as commitments already agreed during the session.

Existing Action Overview

Existing Action	Action Statement
Action SS01	*Launch a "Your Water, Your Future" webpage with clear visuals explaining where customer money goes, why bills have changed, how charges link to investment areas, and what benefits customers and the environment should expect.*
Action SS05	*Develop and publicise investment scheme case studies across different project types and areas, showing purpose, cost, timescales, milestones, customers affected, benefits and progress updates through multiple channels.*
Action SS06	*Share simple explainer videos and quarterly or milestone-based updates through online tools, social media, bills, customer letters and local news to keep customers informed in accessible ways.*
Action SS07	*Raise awareness of the annual report by sharing customer-friendly summaries through letters, bills, short videos and social media, showing business spend and performance against targets.*
Action SS08	*Publish information on the five-year capital investment programme, including live, completed and upcoming regional schemes, so customers can see local benefits up to 2030.*
Action SS09	*Introduce a quarterly "Service Snapshot: Your Money in Action" summary showing performance against key service metrics such as leaks repaired, supply interruptions, water quality, meter installations and support for vulnerable customers.*
Action SS11	*Reduce leakage by 14% over five years through more sensors, satellite technology, pressure management, no-dig repair trials and the wider metering programme to find and fix leaks faster.*
Action SS12	*Publish and promote through at least three channels a customer-friendly Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) summary, with case studies on managing demand, new supply and network resilience.*
Action SS13	*In the WRMP summary, explain pipe upgrades, metering, leakage and burst reduction, and performance on supply interruptions.*
Action SS20	*Introduce an affordability support programme for customers struggling with water costs, including direct financial help and wider support on efficiency advice, income maximisation, benefits and funding schemes.*
Action SS21	*Develop a new customer hub or portal with self-help guidance, FAQs and videos covering charges, meter readings, the metering programme and wider investment plans.*
Action SS22	*Provide accessible customer letters and leaflets on request, expand clear bill and meter guidance online, and keep the website accessible to recognised standards through quarterly testing.*

Attendance list

Elena Karpathakis	Managing Director South Staffs Water & Cambridge Water
Shaun Dowen	Operations Director South Staffs Water & Cambridge Water
Alex Wilkes	Customer Service Director South Staffs Water & Cambridge Water
Clare Glen	Session Lead Facilitator Qualitative Research Director, Taylor McKenzie Research
Bev Keogh	Session Chair Deputy Chair and Non-Executive Board Member, Council for Water
9 x Community Members	Water Voice Community Members South Staffs Water & Cambridge Water Community

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining us. My name is Bev Keogh, and I'll be chairing tonight's discussion. I'm an independent board member and Deputy Chair of the Consumer Council for Water. Tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme, and the purpose of Water Voice is quite simple, but it's really important, and that is to give customers a stronger, much more direct voice in how South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water performs, communicates, and improves.

This session then is about accountability, it's an opportunity for the community members to question the Senior Leadership Team from South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water directly about the issues that matter the most to them, around what needs to improve and what will change as a result of this discussion. This isn't a complaints hearing; it's not a technical enquiry, but it is a structured customer-led conversation focused, like I say, on accountability, learning, and also agreeing clear and practical actions.

The topics that we were going to cover tonight haven't been chosen by the company, or by CC Water - they have been shaped by the community members through some pre-task work. We had a briefing session, we've then had Spotlight research from the wider community and the wider Water Voice discussions, and therefore this has shaped the agenda for this evening.

As the chair, I want to set a real clear tone from the outset. I expect it to be a respectful, but challenging, discussion. Community members should feel able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and expectations, and equally, we expect clear and transparent responses from the South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water Senior Team. Can I ask that when you're not speaking, that you keep your microphone muted just to avoid some background noise, and any playback for other people?

The session will be transcribed, and the agreed outcomes will be published. South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water will also be expected to publish an action plan too, and that will be responding to the commitments that they make this evening. That transparency is really key to this process, and it's what makes this process meaningful. In terms of ground rules for our discussions, we're going to take one person at a time, we're going to keep the contributions focused and we're going to concentrate on forward-looking actions, what will change, by when and how will customers know?

I'd like to briefly introduce those joining us this evening. So, first of all, Clare, an independent facilitator from Taylor McKenzie Research. Clare Glen who is going to guide the customer discussion for us this evening, to make sure that everybody's voices are heard. And representing South Staffs Water and Cambridge this evening I have Elena, the Managing Director, Shaun, Operations Director, and we will be joined by Alex, the Customer Service Director a bit later in the process.

I really want to say a huge thank you to you all for being here this evening - you are what makes this process work. So, I'm going to hand over to you now Clare, just to explain how the session will run in a bit more detail.

TMcK Facilitator: Fantastic, thanks so much, Bev, and for everyone joining us. Before we start the session, I just wanted to begin by explaining how the names in the transcript will be handled going forward. In this room we'll be using first names only and in the published transcript and report, customer names will be anonymised, and so after the session community members will have the opportunity to flag anything personal they'd prefer not to be captured in the transcript or be removed or further anonymised in the transcript before it's published.

I suppose the purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect the discussion and the actions that we will agree tonight, and not to single out anyone in particular. In terms of the flow of the session, we went through this in the briefing session, but just to capture it, there will be three main parts

to the session, the first will be the review part of the existing action plan, and that will be to challenge South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water on the actions the community agreed needed to be strengthened.

The second, we're going to be focusing on the new performance challenge question, and that's been developed from the issues that you identified as community members to prioritise during the briefing session we had last month.

The third area is to move into a shorter sort of quick-fire Q&A session where community members will ask the additional questions that we came up with in the briefing session.

For the first two questions that we go through, we'll be using the same accountability cycle that we talked through, so the community member will be asking the agreed questions, so we know who that is and that will be asked first, and then South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water will have approximately five minutes to respond to that question. We'll have a little timer that will help us keep on track. And community members will then have a chance to react to that response and identify what's clear, what's missing in any of the response and what needs to be strengthened in terms of developing new actions.

In the background, we will create a live document and that will be capturing those specific actions and outcomes and that should form part of South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water's follow-up action plan. South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water will then have a short opportunity to explain if any of the proposed actions that we talk about this evening are not feasible and why that would be the case.

We'll then move on to the sort of quick-fire Q&A session and that will be, I suppose, a lighter version of that process, and the nominated community member will ask the question. The company will respond, and then the question-asker will have a chance to come back, and then we'll offer that discussion out to the wider community to follow-up. Any additional comments and actions will be captured again as we've done in the previous couple of questions.

Hopefully, that's all clear, we've been through the process as a team, and hopefully that's just refreshed our memories, but it would be great just as we did in the briefing session, just to get a very quick round of introductions for the team. It would be great to just go round the room, if you could just tell me your name and where abouts you're based, that would be great. Community Member 1, you're next to me just now, and smiling away, so can I start with you, Community Member 1?

Community Member 1: I'm Community Member 1, I'm based in the West Midlands, and live between Dudley and Wolverhampton, for those of you who know the area.

Community Member 2: I'm Community Member 2, I'm based in very rural Cambridgeshire, although I'm calling in from Portsmouth tonight.

Community Member 3: Hi, my name is Community Member 3, I live in Cambridge.

Community Member 4: I'm Community Member 4, I live just outside of Cambridge.

Community Member 5: Hi, I'm Community Member 5, and I live in Cambridge, in central.

Community Member 6: Hi, I'm Community Member 6, I live out on the edge of Walsall, kind of on the Staffordshire border.

Community Member 7: Hello, I'm Community Member 7, I live in Sutton Coldfield in the West Midlands.

Community Member 8: Hi, I'm Community Member 8, I live in Cambridge as well.

Session transcript

Community Member 9: Hi there, Community Member 9, I also live in Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands.

TMcK Facilitator: Fantastic, thank you so much everyone, I'll had back to Bev just to kick us off.

CCW Chair: Lovely to see you all and thank you for your intros. Okay, so now we're going to begin with the first question. This question is going to look back at the commitments already made in the South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water's action plan during our briefing session. You all agreed that measurable progress and clear benefits from Action 11 around leakage reduction targets needed some further scrutiny. So, I'm going to invite Community Member 2, Clare, I'm not sure, are you putting the question on the screen?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, I'm just going to share it now.

CCW Chair: And then I'm going to invite Community Member 2 to ask the first question, please?

Community Member 2: Thank you. Leakage was one of the areas we felt needed a much clearer commitment. For me, 14% on its own doesn't tell me enough, 14% of what, and how much, water will actually be saved. We want to see clear progress before 2031, with milestones, so we can judge whether you're on track. We also want to understand what this will cost, what benefit customers will see and what happens if progress falls behind. We need to know this is a real, measurable priority and not just a long-term target.

The question is, what measurable progress and customer benefits will you commit to before 2031, to deliver the 14% leakage reduction?

CCW Chair: Thank you Community Member 2, so Elena and Shaun, in responding, it would be helpful if you could be as specific as possible, make sure please if your response to the point can be as jargon-free as you can make it, I know that's tough in the industry.

And to the panel, and community members, please can you listen carefully, make a note of anything that may feel unclear to you or may be incomplete or perhaps not strong enough. Clare, could you add a timer to the screen and Elena and Shaun you will have five minutes. I don't want to have to interrupt you, so I'll let you make best use of those five minutes.

Elena Karpathakis: Okay, thank you very much, I'll kick us off, if that's okay and then I'll invite Shaun to build on my opening comments? So first off, thank you very much for raising this super important topic, I know it's important to all of our customers just as it is to us, it's one of the things that can be a source of frustration, I think, where you feel that we as a water company aren't making enough progress for you, so I understand the root of the ask.

To try and give a sense of, "Well, what are we measuring and why, is this a real target or is it something we're just going to report on at the end of the five-year cycle?" which I think is perhaps what's behind the question. So, our baseline was set in 2020, so 2020, so not the last five-year cycle but the end of the one before that. Our targets are all set across the industry on performance from that point forward. And over the five years from 2020 to the 2025 period, we reduced leakage roughly 20% in both our operating regions. It's slightly higher in one and slightly lower in the other, but just to give you a sense.

What that means is, the amount of water that is leaking from our network, including both our network and on the customer side, we are charged with reducing leakage overall, and we reduced it around 20% in the five years leading up to the financial year that's just finished. Then our targets for this five-year period that we're in now, we've just finished the first year, is another roughly 20% reduction on top of that, so a further reduction on top of what we have already done.

Every year we report, so this is a formal measure that is given to us, influenced by customers, but is agreed between us and the regulator Ofwat, and we report on that publicly and it's available on

our website; how we're doing every year, on each year's target that contributes to that 20%. And in the year that we've just finished, actually we made good progress, which is why there's 14% left still to do, which is the 14% that you will have seen on our action plan that we've shared.

I think the sort of headlines for me, realising I've now used half the time are this is really important, we've published and we'll continue to publish our performance and happy to take your input on how we do that, and whether that is accessible enough to you. But absolutely it receives very regular scrutiny from me personally, and the Executive Team. Over to you, Shaun to build on that, if that's okay?

Shaun Dowen: Yeah, thanks for the question, you've covered it quite well, Elena, I think. What I would add is although we've seen a good 6% reduction to the start of this AMP[3], we're going even harder. We've currently got more leakage technicians and repair gangs out across both of our regions than we have done before, particularly given how challenging this year's been from a heat perspective. But we, over the previous AMP, reduced leakage that was the equivalent of about 56,000 homes' worth of water usage, so this is something that as a team we are really focusing on. I think that Community Member 2, you mentioned you were from Cambridge, which we know is a fairly water-stressed area, so we go even harder in Cambridge and proportionally invest a lot more in finding and fixing leakage in that part of our region, than most other water companies, Community Member 2.

Elena Karpathakis: And for anyone in our South Staffs Water area who's thinking, "Well, what about us?" the water resource position in Cambridge is such that there is a relatively narrow gap between the amount of water that's used, the amount of water that's available to us to extract from the ground, so that's why we particularly focus on Cambridge. Whereas we have more room between the amount of water we're allowed to use and what our customers use in our South Staffs area. But both performances we measure and report on transparently, certainly formally every year.

Shaun Dowen: Yeah, both regions were ahead of target last year.

CCW Chair: Okay, so thank you for that response both, we're going to pause now and go back to the community members, this is the part that's about testing whether what you've just said and what the members have heard actually answers the question and the concerns behind the question. So, Clare, I'll now hand over to you for you to have that discussion?

TMcK Facilitator: Great, yeah, we're really interested in what everyone's got to say after listening in attentively, I've seen people taking notes as well, fantastic. So, as you listen to each other, I'll hand over for you to discuss. I'd love you to think about four things, do you understand what's changed, and do you understand what still needs to happen? Do you know when it will happen and does this go far enough in terms of the commitment we want from the company? I'd like you to tell us what felt clear and concrete and what you heard there, what maybe still felt vague or uncertain, and what was missing, if anything from you? And ultimately what specific commitments need to be strengthened or addressed within that? If you find yourself thinking, "I'd love another question, I'd love to ask another question," try and look into what you would like to see as a commitment or what you would like to be included in, in the next plan?

I'll open it up for discussion then, I can see hands up already, fantastic. Community Member 4, you've got your hand up, do you want to start?

Community Member 4: I will do, thanks. I like the answer, I felt there was commitment there, I like Shaun recognising the dryness of East Anglia and whatever, so that's great. But in the question, it talks about part of this is finding the leaks, so my question was about how do you know, how do you measure this, because if you don't know your leaks, sorry it's as simple as that, how is it measured?

[3] Asset Management Period

Session transcript

I mean it might be something simple that has missed me, but I don't understand if you don't know where your leaks are, how you can measure it?

TMcK Facilitator: So, we want to ask for a commitment around defining how customers can understand that process?

Community Member 4: How do you know how well you're doing, yeah, exactly?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, great. Any other thoughts on that one, and the response?

Shaun Dowen: Do you want me to come in with a response now, Clare, or do you wait until the end?

TMcK Facilitator: Well, we'll give them 10 minutes just to have a chat amongst themselves and then that would be great if you could come in after, Shaun, thanks. Community Member 1, hi?

Community Member 1: Hello, I liked how Shaun, you put it into the statistics, it's 56,000 homes' worth of water that you're trying to save. But I would like a bit more clarity really, I think, around that in terms of what that means as volume of water in cubic metres? Just to feel like there's that clarity, and also perhaps some comparison to how much water is in the system on a daily basis, and how much is being lost as well, just to kind of give some context.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks Community Member 1, anyone else like to jump in?

Community Member 2: I'll jump in. I mean basically that point that was just raised is we talk about 15, or 14% or 20% of the leaks that have been fixed, but what is that volume of water compared to the amount of water that's actually being moved in these areas, so we can understand how that affects the day-to-day operations, how much water was being lost as a total?

And the other side was, we talked about 20% was the first five years and then 20% for the second five year, is that 20% of the original target or was that reset as 100% and then 20% of that new figure?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 8, please jump in as well?

Community Member 8: Yeah, similar comments, but I think it was about – I may have missed it, but what 100% cubic metres was and then probably giving it a comparison to what that means, to pin it to some sort of reality because big numbers don't really often mean much to people.

And then in terms of key actions, I think it was mentioned that more technicians and something else, and I missed that, but I wasn't sure if there was any kind of technology improvements or anything like that, that would help, rather than just putting more boots on the ground? I didn't catch anything of benefit to customers, but I may have missed that as well, and nothing about progress, what to do if progress falls behind, I don't think I caught any of that. But again, I may not have been listening too intently when I was trying to scan through a bit, so those.

TMcK Facilitator: Anything in particular you're looking for in terms of benefits for customers and how that could be turned into a commitment?

Community Member 8: I guess a sort of easy, straightforward one was about lowering bills, I guess would be a common sense one. But also, like water security, I guess, would be one as well. So yeah, probably those two things in terms of the benefits.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 9, you've got your hand up, hi?

Community Member 9: Yeah, I have. I think it's just been covered but I'll say it because it is relevant. Yeah, I was just wondering the benefit and the value to customers in all of this?

Session transcript

Just looking at the action plan, there is reference to using satellite technology, sensors, it just seems quite expensive means and methods. So how is all of this of value to customers?

TMcK Facilitator: Are there any particular concerns you've got, Community Member 9?

Community Member 9: Yeah, it's just around it seems like a very big task, and therefore is it expensive, will we get to know that in terms of how that's been managed?

TMcK Facilitator: Anyone else got anything to add to this? Is this what you were expecting in the response, is there anything you feel is missing or you would like more clarity on?

Community Member 6: I think this one's more for Shaun. Shaun, you touched upon, you know, we're getting more leakage technicians out there, and that's good, obviously it's showing you that you're getting reductions in your leakage. But, the amount of resources that you're having to plough into that, is it sustainable, what are the actual figures in terms of your resources that you're ploughing into finding these leaks? And I think it kind of ties in with what Community Member 9 said, is it value for the customers?

TMcK Facilitator: Any other thoughts leading on from that, any other commitments, anything else you'd like to add? Community Member 2?

Community Member 2: The other one is about the difficulty in dealing with the leaks, you know, some leaks will be far more difficult to put right than others. So, it may be easier to meet these targets with dealing with the easiest 14% at this stage, but what is the long-term plan to deal with the 100% of those leaks?

TMcK Facilitator: So, you're worried about maybe the potential disruption for customers?

Community Member 2: Well, it's not that so much as, you know, some of the leaks will be far easier to fix with the resources needed to put them right, you know, would be far quicker and far easier to put right. Whereas there will be some leaks which will be significantly more expensive and need a lot more resources to put right. When do we decide we can't do that because it's too expensive? Or it's despite whatever the ecological side of things, you know, when do we stop fixing things because it's too expensive?

TMcK Facilitator: So, looking at a commitment around the resources they're putting into this?

Community Member 2: Yeah, are we planning to hit the 100% as a long-term goal, or is it a case of we do what we can, you know, going forward?

TMcK Facilitator: Are we clear really on what customers should expect now for the five year programme? Does it feel that you have enough of an idea about the benchmarks and the milestones?

Community Member 3: Can I just ask a question, please?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 3, yes, please do.

Community Member 3: I know about, Elena mentioned something about the baseline, and I just wanted to find out how do you work out the baseline, please?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so we would change that into an action Community Member 3, you'd want more clarity around how that's defined and how they measure that? Okay, great, thank you. Anyone else that's not had a chance to have a say in this one? Anyone else like to make a contribution? Is there anything else that's missing, anything else you'd like to add?

Okay, right, well we've got the team that have been frantically taking notes behind the scenes in terms of the actions and the commitments we would like to see based on this one.

Session transcript

So, I'm going to share the document that we've been working on. Can everyone see that document okay? Live capturing. You'll see there's four clear columns there, so some indication on what has already been done in terms of the response to the question, what will be done in the future, and what that ideal water company response would look like. So that's capturing some of the actions we've just talked about.

I'm going to read through the actions [A] to [G], and we can work through these as we go. Have a think about whether these capture what we've just talked about and if there start that we would like to amend or to change before we allow Shaun and Elena to come back in on this?

[A] The first one was to explain how the total leakage is actually determined and quantified, so a customer-friendly way of explaining that.

[B] Contextualising improvements and savings - so we talked about the 56,000 homes' worth of water savings, but understanding the scale of that. So, what is the total volume of leakage or total volume of water supplied in that area. So just to contextualise that figure.

[C] Is to clearly justify the investment and methods used in reducing leaks. So, rationalising this against the expected value delivered to customers. So, is that investment good value for customers, ultimately?

[D] Is about communicating the benefits and value to customers of this leakage reduction, what are the costs of the programme and the increase on leakage detection teams?

[E] Is around the technology improvements alongside leakage detection, so what are they actually doing in terms of the fancy technology that's detecting leaks and how customers can understand that?

[F] Is around explaining the point of balance between investment, leakage reduction, and diminishing returns of the water saving.

[G] Is around communicating the plan for detecting harder to fix leaks and justifiable resource that will be allocated to that.

So, lots there to think about, and I just wanted to throw that back out to the team just to see that we're happy with what's there, is there anything you feel is missing that you would like to change or clarify?

Community Member 4: It might just be me, but I'm a bit confused because it says on here, unless I'm misunderstanding the purpose of this, a 20% reduction in leakage. But on the action it was 14% over five years, so have I read that wrong, or is that something else entirely?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so that's what Elena described, so we'll maybe give her a chance to come back on that, but I think that's in the point on the first one, is contextualising those improvements, isn't it?

Community Member 4: Okay, is Elena overstretching? That's fantastic, you know, we'll take 20.

TMcK Facilitator: Anyone else have any thoughts, does it feel clear, is it specific enough for you, would we like to make any changes to the actions there or wordsmith them a bit if we don't understand?

Community Member 3: I think you missed out the question about sustainability.

TMcK Facilitator: Tell me a bit more about that, Community Member 3, what do you feel is missing?

Community Member 3: I think it was mentioned that in terms of the number of technicians that are going to be employed, the mention of new technology, is this something that can be sustained over the number of – can we afford it, can we sustain it, have we got enough funds to do that, to carry on? I think that question was mentioned by one of my colleagues.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: Was that covered in [D] about the leakage detection teams, and the resource there? Would that cover that point, Community Member 3? Okay, great. Community Member 9, you've got your hand up?

Community Member 9: Yeah, I think what's missing, so we were told what's been done in terms of percentages, but we haven't been told what's been done in terms of actions and then what actions are going to be taken going forward to achieve the remaining 14% leakage reduction. So, I think that would be good to know.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so you're looking for commitment around the specific milestones within the five-year plan?

Community Member 9: Yes, the five-year, yes.

TMcK Facilitator: Do you have anything in mind Community Member 9, is that something you would want an annual update on, or biannual, what would be the best way of communicating that to customers, what would you like to see?

Community Member 9: In terms of what actions, I think it would be good to set out what actions are planned, and then as those actions are completed, to let customers know, so it's relevant and it's timely as well.

TMcK Facilitator: An easy way of tracking it for customers to see if they're on track in terms of that?

Community Member 9: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Does everyone else agree with adding that one in? Lots of nods, there seems to be agreement? Anyone else want to come in on Community Member 9's comment there, anything else that you feel?

Community Member 2: Yeah, I think there's got to be a sort of a live document, hasn't it? Because you can't identify what fixes they're going to make in five years' time, but they must have a plan of what they're doing in the next 12 months or so, and it just gets added to and updated when those leaks are fixed and the impact.

TMcK Facilitator: Is there any that we want to get rid of now that we've seen them in the list and we think, "Oh, actually," do we want to hone on any particular ones as being a real area of focus? Or is there any that we think, "Actually, that's less important now that we've seen the whole list"? Or are we happy with them? Who's not had a chance to speak? Community Member 7 and Community Member 5, are you happy with what you're seeing here as well?

Community Member 7: Yeah, I was just having a look to see. What I want to know is how you detect it now, the leaks now, and how is the technology going forward? But I think they're kind of, they've encapsulated it in [I] and I think, there's a couple that are linked together, really, aren't there?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, the technology within [E], yeah?

Community Member 7: Yeah.

Community Member 5: Yeah, I agree with the same thing, I think it's kind of the main points of clarifying and also communicating by outlining what changes are being made explicitly. So yeah, I think those are all good.

TMcK Facilitator: Great, okay, I think I'm going to hand back to Bev now, unless there's anybody else that's got anything else to add?

Community Member 8: I think we just missed a bit about what would happen if they don't meet targets, is that in there, I can't see it, so some kind of accountability?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so if the leakage target slips, and we've tracked the reporting, what the shortfall is?

Community Member 8: What are the repercussions?

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, what are the repercussions. Fantastic, okay, great, we've got a great list there, thanks. I'll hand back to Bev just now.

CCW Chair: Okay, thank you all. So, before we finalise these actions, I just want to give Elena and Shaun a chance to come back in. Again, you will be timed for five minutes, and I know, Shaun, you were keen to give some answers to some questions, so happy for you to do that. And this section as well is about highlighting whether or not you feel these actions are feasible, and particularly of they're not feasible, and then I'd like you to explain why. You know, around things like there may be regulatory, financial, operational, or perhaps legal reasons why these actions can't be committed to?

So, I'm going to hand over to you, I'll give you five minutes. We are slightly ahead of time, so I think if it's very valuable information, I'm happy to extend it to six. So please come back on those questions, about those points you wanted to address first, and then home in on whether these actions, you're happy to take these actions forward with you. I guess Shaun, I'll hand to you, is it?

Elena Karpathakis: If I can speak first, if that's okay, Bev?

CCW Chair: No worries.

Elena Karpathakis: Thank you, I think the first thing I want to say is that listening to the conversation it's very powerfully loud and clear, that what you're telling us is that you need more information around leakage. So, how we measure it, what we're doing about it, and you want to know more and that said, all our customers want to know more.

So, my overall comment on these is that I don't think there is anything that any regulatory rules would prevent us from taking on as actions. Obviously, we'll do a bit of due diligence afterwards like we did with the previous panel. But overall, I understand, I think what you're asking for, I think there are some overlaps here where potentially our answers will address a couple of the questions at a time. Shaun, did you want to say anything specific about one of the points earlier?

Shaun Dowen: Nothing, we can take these questions away, I think there was a fair few questions around using the latest technology and what else we'll be doing to get towards that 100%. Obviously, we've got a good mains replacement strategy across both regions, which is a good way of reducing leakage in the long run. From a technology perspective, we'll share the details, but we're at the forefront of innovation using things like satellites, sniffer dogs, acoustic loggers, using lots of tools, including AI, to help find leaks that we haven't been previously able to find. So, we can share details of all that technology after the call.

CCW Chair: Is there anything you'd like to share from the current actions that you have on your action plan around this, around leakage that you think might be useful to answer any of those questions that were raised?

Elena Karpathakis: Well, actually one of the things that I've been thinking about is a lot of the action plan from the first panel that we did was also around information, you know, and sort of transparency in the way we communicate.

So, we made quite a lot of changes, as I think you'll all know on the back of that panel, and our overall communications about our investment plan, how bills work and so on. So, I think my reflection is that this is taking this now to the next level of ask from this panel, which is focusing down on an area that's really important to you all, so that's what we'll get on and work on next.

CCW Chair: Okay, so we are agreeing then with the actions and to Elena's point, not withstanding the due diligence that will take place afterwards, but if everybody's happy then we can move on to the next part of the session which is around the new challenge question.

Elena Karpathakis: May I ask for Alex Wilkes to be brought in to support for this one, if that's okay?

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, I'm just doing that.

CCW Chair: Shaun, thank you, I think you're leaving us, thank you very much for your contribution.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Shaun.

Shaun Dowen: Thank you.

TMcK Facilitator: Alex should be joining now.

Alex Wilkes: Good evening, everyone.

TMcK Facilitator: Good evening, Alex.

Alex Wilkes: Lovely to see you all.

CCW Chair: Thank you for joining us this evening. So, we're now going to move on to the new challenge question, and you have joined us for this section. This is around a performance issue or a performance challenge that the community members would like to talk to you about. And this topic was prioritised with the pre-task work we did in the briefing session that we held, because rising bills, profits and dividends quite frankly left the community members questioning value for money. And then they wanted some clear improvements in service and affordability, as a result of paying more. So, I'm going to ask Community Member 1 to ask the question. Clare, could you put the question on the screen? It's up. So, Community Member 1, it's over to you.

Community Member 1: Value for money was one of the things that stood out most for us. Bills have increased significantly with only 44% of customers in the survey[2] feeling they're getting value for money. We can see the company made £49.43m profit and paid £6.019m in dividends last year. For me, it comes down to what customers are actually getting in return. They want to see clear improvements in both the service and affordability not just an explanation of where the money goes and want something specific that we can judge you against over the next year.

My question is, what specific improvements in the service and affordability, will you commit to over the next 12 months, so customers can see better value for money?

CCW Chair: Thanks Community Member 1. So, Elena and Alex, in responding again, if you could please be as specific as you were for Q1, and try and talk about what the specifics are around what's being done, what will be improved and by when? Community members, again keep taking notes, please listen very carefully and make a note of anything that may sound or feel unclear, incomplete, or perhaps not strong enough for you. So, Elena and Alex, we're going to add a timer of five minutes to the screen, and I will now hand over to you two to respond to the question.

Elena Karpathakis: Okay, thank you, and thank you Community Member 1 for the question. I think I totally understand the need and desire from you and members of the panel to want to get under what are we spending our money on over the course of this five-year period because it is the biggest investment and therefore the biggest spend that we have been allowed to carry out in a regulatory cycle.

In this five-year period we're spending around a billion pounds over five years, a couple of hundred million a year. The real drivers for that, I saw your question about dividends and profits, so I will address that. But the real drivers for that are being able to do things like continue to improve on our leakage performance, as we've just been talking about. Building, and making sure we have long-term sustainability, of water infrastructure. Many of you are based in Cambridge on this call, which is an area that we are having to invest in for the long-term in order to protect the environment there, which is very delicate, as I know many will know with our chalk streams.

[2] The Water Voice Barometer survey is a monthly survey tracking community members' views of their water company. The referenced statistic reflects the proportion of responding South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water community members reporting that they felt they received value for money.

We're investing as well in customer service, so the reason Alex is joining me for this question is that I know that's one of the most visible things for many of you. The water infrastructure hopefully, all being well, is kind of an invisible thing, your tap comes on, and the water arrives, but we are working hard behind the scenes to make sure that happens, and that the water is of the right quality. Because you may well be aware, with all of the news, climate change is continuing around us, which does as a water company, put additional pressure on our infrastructure. The way we need to treat water, we have to keep changing that, and improving it in order to keep up with those changing raw water that comes into our system.

So, I think overall, we have got a five year set of investment that the customer bill translates into infrastructure, and perhaps one of the things that we still need to do more work on by the sounds of this question, is helping make clearer to you all, why we're spending the money and how that translates into value for you, rather than just what we're spending it on, which I think we perhaps focused on since the last panel.

I'm going to pause there, again I've used more minutes than I should have and invite Alex to join me and build on that, please?

CCW Chair: Sorry, I'm just going to jump in here, sorry Alex. Can you please focus on specific questions, so specific improvements in service and affordability will you commit to in the next 12 months, so customers can see the value for money, yeah? Thank you.

Alex Wilkes: Yeah, that's where I was going to go with it, thanks, Bev. And Community Member 1, it's a brilliant question. Elena's touched on the fact that we concentrate on the fact that every penny we spend is customers' money, and that is a huge responsibility we bear every day. In terms of some specifics, so basically that billion pounds splits into five key categories, so big investments around improving reliability of the network and upgrading the network, improving water treatment, reducing leakage, enhancing customer service, and improving protections for the environment.

Each of those is something that within the Performance Snapshot, which we're about to launch from the first wave of our action plan, will have really clear benefits to customers around how much more water we're able to produce, how much water is not lost through leakage therefore helping to keep bills at an affordable level. Other specifics, we're rolling out smart metering across our region so that customers and ourselves can have much greater visibility around water being lost from the network and being able to action that a lot quicker.

We've just started to launch an affordability advice programme, which is showing phenomenal levels of support and early progress for customers that are really struggling with their water bills.

That's where we put people in support around income maximisation, benefit entitlement checks, as well as our own social tariff discounts and Hardship Fund contributions. We expect that, we already support around 80,000 customers a year through that, and again that's something we can absolutely provide greater clarity and specifics around. We're also investing in a major customer service transformation programme, which will see a whole spate of self-service tools, alongside our contact centre telephony performance.

To give an example, over the last year we've handled around 30% more contact as a result of things like the drought situation and increases in leaks that those weather conditions brought, but we managed to halve the amount of time that it takes for customers waiting to speak to us, on average taking less than two minutes to get through to our contact centres. That's a tangible example of where we've been investing to improve the service that our customers receive.

Session transcript

But I take the challenge that across those five areas that the billion pounds breaks down into, I think we can make specific commitments to talk around the value and the benefit that those investments will bring to individual customers, either in enhancing reliability or reducing water lost and improving the service options you have when you need to come to us for information as part of any interruptions on the network.

CCW Chair: Thank you Alex, I know we went over time there, but it was very, I think it's very helpful for the community members to hear what you were saying. You were making very relevant points, so thank you for that. We're now going to pause and turn back to the panel members, and I just want to raise a point here. Elena, just on a point that you made earlier, it sounded as if you referenced that this was a different panel, I just wanted to reassure you that it's the same panel, it's just this particular call is made up of some different customers, but the actual panel from which we get the information hasn't changed, so it's not like restarting the process, I just wanted to reassure you of that.

Okay, so Clare, this bit is about testing with the panel again whether what you've heard all of you answers your question? So, I'm going to hand over to you, to have your discussion.

TMcK Facilitator: Great, thanks, Bev. So, I would just like to add, think back to the briefing session and some of the things we discussed in that session and compare that to what we've just heard and really think about the company's response here. What sounded positive, what gave you confidence that you were going to get an answer to that question around the 12 months and the value for money?

What still feels unclear if any of it is a bit vague? Is there anything that wasn't addressed that you would like to see addressed going forward? Have they gone far enough in terms of what Alex and Elena have said? Most importantly, what would you like them to commit to going forwards? Alex mentioned some commitments and being specific about the commitments, is there anything specific we would like to see put in as a commitment, as an action?

So, I'd love to just open it up and Community Member 1, you've got your hand up, so we'll start with you and open up the discussion, thanks.

Community Member 1: Thank you. I really liked the way Alex talked quite passionately about the investments of the company and the kind of initiatives that are being undertaken to improve customers' experiences. I think we need a little bit more clarity on that key part of the questions around the next 12 months and what we as customers will see and be able to measure the effectiveness by within the next 12-month period.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks Community Member 1. Is there anything specific, are you wanting a specific action on anything in particular within that?

Community Member 1: I think yeah, I mean it's great to hear all of these things that are going on, but that's great over five years that these things are going to happen, but what's going to happen next, what's the next though, because what will that look like in 12 months? There's been a lot of investment into customer service and reducing customer waiting times and that customer contact, but what's the next priority, what will that look like in 12 months' time, and how will that feel for customers, how will we know that?

TMcK Facilitator: So, we want a specific benchmark here, a specific action, and a specific customer benefit that's trackable within that 12 month window?

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So, is there anything that Elena and Alex could commit to in terms of delivering that customer service benefit, that would be great? Okay, Community Member 6?

Community Member 6: Mine kind of ties in with Community Member 1, so my notes I think it's great that Alex, you say you've assisted 80,000 customers in terms of support and hardship funds. I think I'd want to know what the actions are for the next 12 months and targets to aim to double those figures, not sounding greedy. It would be better to see how you're targeting yourselves for the coming 12 months, and I've also made a note on the basis of you say you've halved the time that customers wait, which is excellent to hear, do you aim to sustain that halved waiting time? So yeah, some more detail in the actions around what you're targeting for the next 12 months.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 4, you've got your hand up as well?

Community Member 4: Just a reflection of how hard answering that question is, because I've spotted, you know, Elena said you can't always spot the value because they could be investing in stuff today that gives value down the road. But it's typical of society to a degree, isn't it, that we all want everything tomorrow, and that's fine, and Alex came in with some good, tangible things today, and I like that as well.

I think we've got to remember there's the stuff that's being invested in today which will bring value tomorrow, and I know we can all be sceptical and say, "Oh, well that's not …" but that must be a real, hard challenge. Because you could pump everything into today, right, get that two minutes down to 20 seconds if you want, but it might not be good for the overall drought situation in 15 years. So, I'm mindful that they run it as a business and not as politicians, so to speak. So, I like the answer to that because there is a balance there.

But going back to some of my fellow panel members, having as many tangible things is always useful and I really like that example because that's a real one. You know, to halve the time, that's great, at a time where you feel sometimes you can't even get through to a human half the time, let alone get through, so that's encouraging.

TMcK Facilitator: It sounds like I'm hearing that actually focusing on one or two things that really matter to us as a community, maybe call waiting times or whatever that is, and getting those two or three specifics right and measurable over those 12 months feels like a tangible example that can be measured and tracked?

Community Member 4: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 7, I think you're maybe next?

Community Member 7: Yeah, all I picked up on is you mentioned about the long-term sustainability for Cambridge, what about the value for money for us in South Staffs and where does – bringing it more home to us there as well?

TMcK Facilitator: Have you got anything in mind Community Member 7, that you would want to see improved?

Community Member 7: Just from the call so far, it's been quite focused on the Cambridge area for me, I want to know what's the benefit for me, what's the benefit for rest of the half of us on the call? I did like the way that Alex broke everything down into the five points, it gave a much better understanding to be honest, of what's going on.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 9?

Community Member 9: Yeah, there was lots of really useful detail and information about what money's being spent on. But when and how does that equate to affordability for customers and how will they know and how will we know that that's been met in terms of a measure?

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: We actually talked about it in the briefing session that value for money figure, didn't we, that was the 44% as a baseline. So, we did talk about it in the session, is that what you're referring to, Community Member 9? Do you remember, I think we talked a bit about that? It was on the factsheet, there was something about 44% value for money for the community, so are we looking for something using that baseline?

Community Member 9: Yeah, so yeah, in terms of improving that, and the question asked about specific improvements in service and affordability, so I think a lot's been explained about improvements in service, but all that's costing money. So, at what point does the customer get the benefit and does that equate to affordability for the customer? So yeah, it's around when will that improve, how are they improving that 44%?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 2?

Community Member 2: Yeah, so I mean the first point it's not to do with the 12 months that we're asking here, but Elena mentioned that this £1m spend is the biggest they've been allowed to undertake. That is where we want to see the benefits as well, does that mean that in the future the sort of spends are going to be less and therefore the bills will be kept at a lower level? Or does it mean that this sort of thing will be an ongoing thing for the future? And then the second part was, what Alex said was really good and you know, talking about the five areas he could sort of commit to one item of each.

It's just making sure the items that are picked for that are important enough and big enough pieces of work. Obviously, they're spending £200m or so in a year, we don't want to see just something that's a very small project that they can say, "Yeah, we did that in the year." Something that is reasonably challenging, although we can't obviously identify those bits of work without seeing the whole plan.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so something meaty and substantial that we'd like to put a target against within both the affordability and the service improvements?

Community Member 2: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything else that we talked about in the briefing that would be worth covering off here or is there anything you feel is missing in the response?

Community Member 3: For me, Alex had a good point on most of the key points, however, I would like to know more about water treatment, because I still have issues with my water, so if you could just mention, you mentioned improvement, reliability, or restructuring or something, I couldn't quite hear that, but I heard something about water treatment, so it's something that you are very much aware of. It would be nice to just know, how, what are your plans moving on because water treatment in Cambridgeshire is a big issue.

Community member 5: Yeah, I thought it was quite, like I thought that the answer was quite substantive and there was a lot of information. I think if there was more time within the allotted five minutes, it would have been nice to hear exactly what the affordability advice programme entails. And also, for those who use it, how effective it is, and also is it sustainable as well, especially if the number is expected to rise with the number of people receiving it, if it is financial help?

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything else on that, Community Member 5, that you would want to know as a customer that you'd want them to commit to communicating about?

Community Member 5: I think in general, I think it goes without saying, a lot of it is just communication and ensuring that there's enough information given. And yeah, I think that kind of goes for all of the points I've noted down is generally just making sure that the information is very easily accessible as well.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so it's the two points really, it's about the communication but also about tracking measurable things that are happening?

Community Member 5: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Anything else you feel was missing that you would like to tackle, or do you feel we've covered everything we'd like to share, some of the things we've talked about? No, we all seem happy with that one? Community Member 6, are you jumping in there?

Community Member 6: What it is, just a thought that I had, I think Alex broke down the key five areas of where that money is spent, and obviously that money that you've got now to spend is the biggest you've ever had, which is a big deal. I think it would be really transparent, as an action, to have how much you tend to allot to each category, which category pulls the most money out of that pot for you as an organisation?

I think that can help customers understand where a lot of the funds have to go, so it provides transparency around which categories have the biggest pull on the funds.

TMcK Facilitator: Great, that's a great point, thanks Community Member 6.

Community Member 6: Especially as Elena mentioned that infrastructure does tend to be the silent behind the scenes, but probably actually costs the most. So yeah, just a thought.

TMcK Facilitator: Just providing more transparency will allow you to see that value piece within the next 12 months? Community Member 5?

Community Member 5: I suppose it feels very menial compared to all of the other things mentioned, but I was just wondering whether water pressure features in the value for money and whether that's something that's looked at? I find that I end up wasting more water, taking longer to do certain tasks because the water pressure in my area is quite bad. But yeah, I was just interested if that was something that features?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so we're honing in on some specifics here that are of interest, so water pressure being another theme or area that you might be interested in. Are there any other particular areas where you see value that you would like to see commitments against or an action against?

No? Okay, well what we can do now is as we've done before, we'll share the actions that we've captured so for, just to see how we feel about these. As before, we've got the three columns around what's been done, what's in the plan, what's in the future plan, and our focus is on the actions that we've generated here.

[A] Communicate what the next priority for investment is in the next 12 months and a commitment of what will be delivered, so focusing in on that specific timeframe.

[B] Clearly outlining targets in the areas that Alex has mentioned, around improvements or customer service wait times. We talked about water pressure there that we might want to add in, over the coming 12 months.

[C] Tackling the balance between service, maintenance and improvement, and affordability for customers.

[D] Future bill clarity, so on whether bills will continue to rise or whether investment now translates into affordability in the future.

[E] Outlining specific and substantial commitments across the five key investment areas, which links to [B] I suppose in understanding what those targets are.

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[F] Detailing the sustainability of financial hardship support, that Community Member 5 mentioned, which was interesting.

[G] Communicating what investment is planned for water treatment specifically.

[H] Around a breakdown of investment over the next 12 months, which is tied into the first one, really.

[I] Outlining whether water pressure factors into the company's value for money considerations.

So, a few interesting themes that we feel would signify what our panel feel is a value for money measure, if you like. So open back up to the panel, are we happy with these commitments, were there any that were missing that we've discussed or anything that you would like to change here or add to the document? If you've mentioned a point, do you feel it's captured there?

Community Member 2: I'm just thinking about on [D] on future bill clarity, bills will continue to rise, we know they will, but it's really will they rise above inflation, I think you might say rather than staying at an affordable level?

TMcK Facilitator: Are there any things specifically, if we were to narrow it down, is there one area in particular, one or two areas in particular we would like more focus on? There's quite a lot there, but is there anything now that we've got a long list, is there anything we want to really hone in on? If there's one or two there that really we feel more strongly about?

Community Member 7: I think it's clearly outline the targets in the areas, we want to know for the five areas where the money is going to in those five areas.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so within the next 12 months what are the five areas, what are the actions within those particular areas and how that investment's been split up?

Community Member 7: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: Does everyone else agree with Community Member 7 on that one? A couple of people mentioned that one anyway, Community Member 4, you're agreeing with that.

Community Member 4: Yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: We're all very focused tonight.

CCW Chair: Panel, I think the more specific you can be here the more valuable it will be for the company and for Elena and Alex to understand how to meet and exceed your expectations, you know, what you really want. So, be sure before we move on, we've got time, are these actions really getting over what the points that you discussed in that briefing session, are you happy with this?

Community Member 2: I think one of the difficulties is, we don't know the plan of work for the five-year plan and what they're delivering and when, so it's difficult to identify what particular pieces of work are scheduled in the next 12 months that they could report back on, and what we would consider important. We kind of have to leave it to them to make sure they are substantial pieces of work that they come back with. If they come back with something we feel isn't up for it, then we should go back and say, "No, that's an easy fix, it doesn't show anything that you're committed to improving things."

TMcK Facilitator: I suppose they're looking for our guidance as a community for you to highlight what you feel is important for you in your everyday lives and your experiences, and that will also guide their priorities. So, it's a bit of a double-edged commitment here to make sure they want to listen to their customers on this panel to make sure that they're delivering for you. So, if there's a commitment there or an area of frustration, or something that you feel you want to have highlighted in the next action, then this is your chance to say, "Look, actually wait times aren't

important," or "this is particularly important to me in terms of how I assess good value for money." Is there anything from you guys that you would want to see highlighted?

Community Member 4: I think this is useful because it kind of tracks it, right, this is what our discussion has been? But a theme running through is trackability, I'm sure other words are available, so [A] to [I] here, so for the next action sheet we get, it would be nice to know that three of these, for example, are directly linked to that action. I mean it can be inferred obviously when you read it, so it's just this is a useful method for taking it through, but it's, "Right, how do all of these link to the actions, and if those actions don't fully cover these, then there need to be new actions?" right?

So, for me, it's about the translation of these, what the ideal situation, the vision. For me this is a how it's going to feel, and whatever, that's great, but how is that going to be achieved through actions and how is that monitored, measured, tracked? That's kind of how it feels. I feel the themes are right, it's just getting to that next bit.

TMcK Facilitator: Elena and Alex, maybe that's a challenge for you to take on is committing to which themes and which particular areas you feel are trackable, if you like, for customers that you would be able to highlight?

CCW Chair: We can talk about that when I come back to Elena and Alex in a second. I think let's give you some time to think about that question, that point?

Community Member 8: Slightly off tangent, but before I was in the office earlier and my colleague, she's like, "What are you doing tonight?" I was like, "I'm doing a water panel," and explained it. Anyway, she was like, "Oh I watched this programme called Dirty Business," and she made me Google it, but it talks about a lot of quite pollution, and then she linked it to foreign investment, about people that don't really care about the state of our rivers and things like that.

So, in terms of financially accountability, it's not mentioned here, how is it explained where investment and I guess where dividends are being paid to, do these people care about our water system? I mean that's something that she was quite passionate about and made me promise to watch the show, and I promised I would. So yeah, it's about that kind of financial accountability and where the money goes, where the money trail is.

TMcK Facilitator: Do we feel, if we look back at the question, "What specific improvements and service and affordability will you commit to over the next 12 months, so customers can see better value for money?" Do we feel we've answered that question, is there anything else that you can think of in terms of developing a commitment here or do you feel that what we've captured is what we discussed in the session?

Community Member 2: I feel there's enough information there for them to come back with commitments.

TMcK Facilitator: Well, if we feel we've covered – there's a long list there, we will move on to the next question, but I'll hand back to Bev just now to sum up on that one.

CCW Chair: Yes, thank you panel. So, before we finalise any of these actions, I do want to come now back and give Elena and Alex a chance to respond. So, Elena and Alex, is there anything on here that you feel that you cannot commit to, and if that is the case, if you were to explain why. And if you're happy to commit to the actions, and I think that point that Community Member 4 raised around trackability for want of a better word, is something that would be helpful to hear from you as well. So, I'll just hand over to you, Elena.

Elena Karpathakis: Yeah, thank you very much. So, as an overall principle, I think the actions by and large make sense to me.

I do hear the point from Community Member 4 about which ones of these are trackable, because some of them are positional responses, which we'll make, so we will consider that as part of our response planning for these. I can't remember who said it, but someone made the point about making sure that each of these actions then are addressed in our responses, and I do just want to reassure everyone that each action we then do respond to specifically, so we won't lose those.

I do want to come to Community Member 8's point at the end there about Dirty Business, and I have seen that TV programme. I do just want to clarify that South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water are clean water only companies, and Dirty Business was referring to sewage, which isn't something that is part of our remit, so I just want to make that point just to make sure everybody is understanding our role in the sector.

The only other thing I do want to say is just that final action, which I think is letter [J], is that fundamentally I and the Leadership Team of the business are accountable for the service improvement. Our investors own us, but fundamentally they employ me and the Leadership Team, so I would just ask if it's possible to edit that one, because the investors own us, and it's our job to deliver service performance.

Alex Wilkes: Can I just build on some of those points, Elena, for the remaining time?

Elena Karpathakis: Of course.

Alex Wilkes: First of all, can I just say what an incredibly well-informed panel and thank you so much for your questions, it's been fantastic hearing people that have clearly got to grips with what we do as a business, so thank you. For me, success is fundamentally is customers telling us that we are improving, and we've got a raft of measures, we've our customer service satisfaction measures but also the value for money indexes.

There's also something we track around just general perceptions of our business, and that is fundamentally how we'll know that this is working and that will be part of the impact assessment, I would like to commit to coming back to you with on those performance updates. I would rest assured, we benchmark everything, I really meant what I said about we take it incredibly seriously, the pennies that we spend, all come from customers, the pennies, pounds, and in our case billion pounds, is all coming from customers.

We track as an Executive Team, every month, hundreds, about 300 different benchmarks and metrics to know that our actions are having an impact both in the short, medium and the long-term. I think it was Community Member 4 that was talking about some of these will have longer-term paybacks. So, within the specific actions we'll give you within those five areas, they will be benchmarked and we will have those interim targets.

Community Member 5, brilliant question, I would love to talk to you about affordability, so we've got loads we can talk about there. The headline response is we're saving customers several years' worth of their water charges in one hit, so I think we can definitely see that that is sustainable. I think that was Community Member 6's question about sustainability. What we would say is, our performance today is a platform for us to build and continue to improve on, not to have a short-term bounce.

My team of which some are observing today, will tell you I'm never happy because I'm here to represent customers and demand more for customers that pay our wages and pay their bills. So absolutely this is not about short-term hits, hoping that focus will move on to another topic, this is about the last year becoming a new baseline that we then build upon each year and have continuous improvement, that is definitely the customer service strategy that I look after.

In terms of the value for money piece, ultimately this isn't about us describing activity to you, it's going to be about the so what, and what you feel, because I'll bring it back to, that's the only way

I'll move a customer measure, because customers won't pat us on the back for doing stuff, that's what our job is to do, they will congratulate us if they start to feel the impact of that. So, I've heard you loud and clear, and that's an absolute firm commitment coming from all of us on the Leadership Team for South Staffs and Cambridge.

CCW Chair: Thank you very much. Alex, to Community Member 5's point, I think maybe there's something for you to take away there around how do you communicate and share that success that you're having from the affordability work that you're doing as well? Thank you for raising that and addressing that.

And Community Member 8, just for you to know or to build Elena's point and to reassure you that there are other panels who are challenging the companies who manage the wastewater in your area, so there are the same panels and communities established with those companies, they will be addressing spillage for sure. I just wanted to reassure you on that point that you've been heard, and other people have taken that up on your behalf.

I'm taking it then Elena and Alex that you're happy to accept the questions, albeit with some due diligence afterwards, the same as the initial question?

Alex Wilkes: Yes.

CCW Chair: So, now that we have agreed those actions from the new challenge question, we will add those to the company's action plan once they have been finalised alongside the commitments agreed during the first discussion. So, this is a continuity process, it's one big panel, one big community, and we may have different membership as we go forward on these panel sessions, but the action plan will be one action plan focus for each company going forward.

Thank you all very much. We are now going to move into the final part of tonight's session, which is where we get a chance to do some Q&As. I'm hoping that Elena and Alex that you feel a little bit less time-constrained in this section. So, we have three questions but if it means we ask, you know, that a panel member asks just one, but we get a lot of value from that discussion, then that's okay, all right?

I do want you to still be conscious though of how much you're speaking, just to make sure that it's balanced between you and the panel. There's no timer as such, okay? We're going to now go over to Community Member 4, and I'd like you Community Member 4, to ask the first question, if that's okay?

And then I'll come back to you at the end to make sure that you're happy that your question has been answered, Community Member 4, and give you an opportunity in case you have some follow-ups that you might want to ask off of the back of it as well. So, Community Member 4, over to you and Elena and Alex, I'm happy for you to go ahead and respond directly.

Community Member 4: Thank you. I mean the context of this question was around trust because I'd spotted the trust percentage and the confidence, and I think these panels are great, and I think the actions are great, but clearly there's a responsibility to provide trust to your customers that these things will be dealt with? So, I mean this question is based around who is accountable for these actions, so Alex, you mentioned the Executive Team, so I'd love to see an Executive Team member against these actions.

And possibly, to be fair, it already has that, you're just not showing us that, and that's fine. But I tend to find in my business if you put someone's name against it, it tends to progress more, but maybe that's just where I've been working. So yeah, that's the basis of the question.

Elena Karpathakis: Thank you Community Member 4. I totally agree having named accountable owners is super important in getting anything done I find, otherwise we end up with a sort of

committee ownership, and everyone thinks everyone else is doing it. So very much aligned with your view there.

Fundamentally for us, so Alex is a member of my Executive Team and I lead the business. So, I feel very accountable to this panel in all its forms, the prior version, and this version. And the actions that we agreed last time, which will now be extended to include the actions from this time, are overall owned within the Exec Team by Alex, who is our customer service director, because this is such an important way of engaging with customers.

But with input and support from all his colleagues on the rest of the Exec Team, which includes Shaun and others who are watching this but not participating today. And fundamentally, the person who's accountable when it comes to it is me, and I think that's why I'm invited to come and answer to all of you on this regular basis on how we're doing and what we're doing.

Alex, do you want to talk a little bit more about the sort of governance and control we had around this, because we do treat this as very important, please?

Alex Wilkes: Yeah, Community Member 4, it's a brilliant question and fundamentally we're a 400 strong organisation, this is not some big corporate machine where each of these is sat with a team of 10 plus, these are named individuals against each one. I'm ultimately, I know Elena feels the accountability, but I feel that accountability on the business's behalf too.

So, I own this plan, I have a head of customer experience that then is scrutinising this on a weekly basis, let's put it in those terms, and then we have a customer service improvement manager called Kayleigh, who literally has owned every update that we have provided and is working on it on a daily basis.

I know at any one time where those 26 so far, it could be about 46 after this evening, but actions are, and where we're performing against them. To be honest, I think there's still some, and as a new process, there's still some refinement of the actual process and how we actually communicate back to you as a panel. I think, I hope the more recent updates we've been providing … Because I think initially we were focusing on the most due actions, which we then clocked had given the impression that the others were just parked, and they absolutely are not, we are progressing every single one and all of the sub-actions that make up to those.

We're now in a position where we're committing to essentially a three pronged here's what we've done, here's what the impact so far has been and here's what's coming next, so that you can have that view against each one with named individuals against each one. Again, tracking lots of the deliverables and the clear benefits that we've committed to within it.

I'd also point out that something we're seeking to do is to increase the amount of independent oversight as well, so we have a board champion focused on customer, who is here observing this evening, Sara. Sara scrutinises us as an Exec Team on that on a very regular basis. We also have our Independent Chair of our Independent Customer Group, Matt, who I believe is also observing, and we're actually in conversation about how we share those updates with that group in parallel to yourselves, so there's an extra level of accountability.

So, you asked about consequences, and would we get early warning and so forth, my improvement manager will know first, my head of will know second, and I will know a few minutes later, as it were. But we will now have that extra rigor around the governance to make sure that things do not get missed.

If there's ever been an impression that, "Why have they not started yet?" I want to know that via CCW and so forth, because every single one of these actions we're really focused on, not just because we like to keep the panel happy as much as we do, but because you are representing our customer base and our obligation is to spend customers' money wisely and have people that were

there a choice to come to us – I know we're in a monopoly environment, but were there a choice, we want them to pick our company because we take it really seriously. So local people working for that local community, a name on every action, I can assure you, Community Member 4.

CCW Chair: I just want to come in here because the second part of this question, so the first part is around who is accountable, which is great, so using a RACI model, Elena you will be responsible, Alex you will be accountable. But the second part of the question are around consequences if a deadline is missed or fails to deliver.

So maybe both of you, this is a great opportunity to talk to that point because of course these accountability sessions are only useful if we do what we say we're going to do, right? So maybe spend a little bit of time on answering the second part of that question, because the first part was really helpful?

Elena Karpathakis: Yeah, so happy to Bev, and that's a good challenge. I think for ultimate accountability, as I said at the start of this question, sits with me and the rest of the Executive Team of the business, albeit a small business, as Alex has said of 400 or so of us. All of our outcomes which include our customer outcomes, our investment outcomes, things like leakage, things like our overall customer experience, which all of these improvements are designed to help with, all of those form part of a scorecard for our business, which is also going to drive whether we all are continued to be employed and our compensation.

And all of that, at least in the case of me, is reported every year publicly and is available on our website, so you can see how we're performing and how that translates into reward or not.

Alex Wilkes: Yeah, and I think the only build Elena, would be Bev, in response is that fundamentally if we don't do these actions, trusting this process that this panel is representative of our wider customer base, if we don't honour these, then satisfaction isn't going to improve. And fundamentally that is a key driver for us because we want happy customers, as I've spoken about, but there are also regulatory sort of mechanisms around that, where the worse our customer service is, we would be penalised.

Now, fundamentally, our driver is because it's the right thing to do, but there are literally mechanisms, so if we miss actions and we ignore things in here, the logic of the purpose of these panels would be our satisfaction would fall. And if our satisfaction falls, we would start to be penalised more by our regulator. So, there is that sort of direct correlation, but for us, touch wood, I mean if we're late, we're late by a couple of weeks due to a technicality of how we get the website to actually accept what we want to update on it, it's that level of thing.

So, I think I would also, I wouldn't say it won't happen, but thus far our track record is pretty strong at taking these actions really seriously. And from a standing start, from April to have the 26 all in really good shape, is something that we've taken very seriously.

CCW Chair: Good, and just for the panel to know we do have Ofwat and representatives from Defra listening in to this discussion this evening as well, so there's regulatory input in the background. Community Member 4, are you happy that the question has been answered and do you want to ask any follow-on question yourself?

Community Member 4: No, I won't take more time, I'll just say I like it because it personalised the question, and as a customer, I can only speak for myself, I just want to feel like there's humans behind this. And you reminding us you're just a company of 400 is useful because often we hear water and we think of Thames Water on the telly and we think of mega organisations.

So, I think it is useful to be reminded that you're not one big – you are a smaller organisation trying to achieve either clean water or wastewater, so that's useful to know. But the fact that you use individual names was really powerful because it makes us feel – I hope those people are real?

No, I'm just joking. But ultimately, it's about increasing confidence and satisfaction. On a personal level, my confidence is slightly higher now, I won't tell you where I started, but it's slightly higher, so that's a positive thing.

CCW Chair: And that is what this is about, right? This is about helping to increase trust in the sector, supporting people like Alex and Elena to feel closer to the customers and for you as billpayers to know that you can have a voice to hold your company to account to perform for you. So that is what these sessions are for, the longer we run them, the more and more that value I'm hoping these will bring. So, Clare, I'm going to hand over to you just to see if there's anyone else in the wider panel that would like to ask a follow-on question?

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, just opening it up to the floor then, is there anything else that anyone else would like to contribute there, are you happy with the response there, is there anything else you would like to challenge on or potentially create an action from going forward on this one? No? Okay. There's a couple of minor points I'll share the screen again just to see that we're happy with what the team have captured here and if there's anything else missing.

Similar to what we were doing last time, we've captured some of the response there and some next steps. As we've highlighted, there's three areas here:

Assigning accountable Exec Team members against each action, so putting a name and face against a response to Community Member 4's point to personalise this.

Adopting a three-pronged approach to action delivery, so what's been done, what's been the impact and what's coming next. So, making it very transparent.

Continuing to progress all actions, not just the most pressing ones. So as Alex was mentioning there, making sure that the background work that's been done is clearly traceable and highlighted in the feedback we get from you guys. So, thank you.

CCW Chair: I think that point Community Member 4 made earlier on, trackability is important to raise here as well. And also, Alex raised a point about challenging himself and the team to do more to communicate progress on actions. I think there's something, I think there's about five delayed but in progress actions and two of those are in discussions with CC Water, so how do we get that traction is being made over? So, there may be something to add here around that point because that was really valid.

Okay, so we have time, I think we should come to Community Member 5, if you're happy to do that? It will probably be the final question of the session, so I'm going to hand over to you.

Community Member 5: New technology could make it easier to get information and support, but it should not leave behind customers who are less confident online, or who need to speak to someone. How will you use AI and other new technology to improve customer service without digitally excluding customers who need or prefer human support?

CCW Chair: Elena and Alex, we've got about 10 minutes left, so I'm just going to hand over to you to respond.

Alex Wilkes: Yeah, Community Member 5, again thank you, what a great question. For me it's all about choice - never, ever forcing somebody down a one size fits all approach. So, we are investing in this area very significantly, I touched on it in an earlier answer, so just to give you a little bit more. We're investing about £8.5m over the next four to five years on a major customer service investment, what we call "omnichannel".

Just to translate that, what that means is giving customers a range of routes into our business, a range of channels of which they can interact with us. Which includes a lot more self-service options which behind the scenes will have AI and different routing and tracking things in it, to

help speed up the process for a customer and get more of an instant access if they are minded to do so. But fundamentally telephone will still be a critical part of our service mix, and it is about choice not, "That is your route, you want to tell us you're moving house, you can only use Route A," is not something we will ever do.

But what we can do really cleverly in the background as part of that investment is ensure that when you do phone up, unbeknown to you the agents that you're dealing with are what we call having a "guided journey", so all the knowledge they need for when a customer wants to talk about a home move, and then maybe a billing issue, and something to do with their supply interruption, we can be really smart about giving them all of that information at their fingertips within a single system. So, they're not having to toggle between screens, they're not having to hand you off from an interruptions team to a billing team, to a home move team, they can deal with the whole thing all at once.

So, in my language that means more "right first time", so you can get an answer quicker, and it also means that you don't have to be handed off or phoning back. It also means once you phone up, we'll know everything you've interacted with us recently about, so we could even then check back in and say, "Look, I know you've phoned us about billing, but I spot that you told us you're moving house a couple of weeks ago," and we can check in with that.

That's AI in the background, but it's not AI forcing you to only deal with us via a chatbot or only deal with us via a different mechanism. It's just about choice and reducing what we call "customer effort". Fundamentally we ought to be a nice, simple service, which is clean, fantastic water every time you turn your tap on, and great value for money as we've spoken about. We know that customers don't want to be spending loads of time chasing and feeling like they have to do the hard yards when they do need to interact with us.

So, there's an awful lot of tools that we can use to build on that service performance that I spoke about, it's not just about wait times, once you're in to us. I said earlier, it takes about just under a couple of minutes to get through to our contact centres, I want that to be shorter. But something else I'm focused on is when you're through, instead of it taking about eight to nine minutes to fully service what your interaction was, if we can cut that down by about a quarter, you'll be happier because you're not having to spend as much time on the telephone, but it means we can handle more calls, more interactions with the same number of staff, which means we keep bills lower in the round.

So yes, we have a big programme, yes there's loads we can report back to in terms of as that progresses, and we will be doing that as part of those service snapshots, but the focus is not about forcing you into a channel, it's about making sure you have choice, you have a speedier access to the information you want, and you do that via the channel you're most comfortable with.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Alex. Elena, anything you'd like to add?

Elena Karpathakis: Well, I had wanted Alex to answer this because it is a special project that he has personally championed, so I'm really pleased that you've had the chance to talk about that, Alex. All I would add is that I think our customer experience hasn't been where we've wanted it to be, and that's why we're making this investment, and I'm looking forward to all our customers seeing the benefit from it.

CCW Chair: Community Member 5, are you happy your question's been answered, any follow on from you?

Community Member 5: I think that's been very good. Personally, I love using AI and I can really see the value that you put across with using it. But you know, for people like I think my dad especially, he definitely prefers to speak to a person, so the fact that you have varied approaches, and that it's available depending on what you prefer and what you're happiest with.

I really appreciate that's being kept, but you're still advancing with new technology as well.

CCW Chair: Thank you Community Member 5, I know this was a very important question for you from a multigenerational inclusion perspective, so thank you for that. Clare, I'll hand over to you and let's open it up?

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, I was just going to say, is there any other points to cover off here, is there any specific actions or commitments that we would like them to make in this area? Or are we happy with the response as it stands? All happy? Okay, if we're all happy, I wonder if we've got time for another quick question then?

Community Member 8: There was a strong feeling in our session that reducing demand should be a shared responsibility with businesses and other large water users such as data centres and I'd add agriculture, expected to play their part too. What are you asking businesses and large water users to do to reduce demand and protect water supplies and how we make sure that they do their fair share alongside households?

Elena Karpathakis: Thank you for the question, and this is very pertinent, or it feels very pertinent at the moment despite I'm sitting here in our water office right now, and it has been quite wet today. But put that to one side, we are in drought in both of our operating areas and I imagine that all of you will know that it takes quite a long time to recover from that, although this rain is welcome. For our Cambridge customers in the meeting, you'll know that we have a hosepipe ban in force there.

Fundamentally, we do ask our non-household customers to support us with water use reductions in times like this. But we have certain powers that we can apply at certain times, and we have to do them in a particular order, when we have demand exceeding our ability to supply as we have seen over the course of this summer. One of the earlier steps is asking household customers to reduce more non-essential use, so watering the garden, for example, and washing cars with a hosepipe, which we've done. And we're very grateful, by the way, I'm very grateful that having requested a hosepipe ban for the first time in 30 years, our customers responded really well, and I'm very appreciative of that, and it has made a huge difference.

We are able to ask non-household customers as a next step to stop their non-essential usage as well, that's called a "non-essential use ban", which is an additional step which goes beyond asking first for household non-essential usage to be reduced. And the reason for that, and it's a sort of nationwide rule, the reason for that is to protect the economy because if we ask businesses to reduce their usage, so organisations like car washes for example, jobs will potentially be affected. So, I think that's what the sort of logic of the hierarchy is.

So that's the rules, but what we have been doing in Cambridge is even without that enforcement, we have asked our business customers to the extent of going to talk to them in person with some of our people, some of our biggest customers, to reduce their usage given the drought that we've been in, and they have done that willingly to support us. So that includes housing developers, I can imagine it's very frustrating for customers to see housing developers watering lawns on new developments, for example, when a hosepipe ban is in use.

Those are some of the conversations we've had, and our household customers have supported through this period, which I'm also grateful for. Alex, would you like to add anything?

CCW Chair: Sorry Alex, can I say less about restrictions probably and more about what you're asking them to do, yes?

Alex Wilkes: Yeah, okay, absolutely, Bev. I think I just wanted to add a bit of colour there for the different sort of sectors that we were reaching out to, because we essentially when in the height of the hosepipe ban, we had teams of people, lots of them within my department, phoning round to

different sectors, things like leisure facilities, so we were phoning golf clubs speaking around reductions of sprinkler use. We were talking to housing developers.

There's a little bit of nuance with housing developers that general customers may not identify to some extent, we went a little far. So, we requested their engagement so much so that a few were then contacted by the council because they have things around dust suppression systems, which is sometimes why they are sprinkling. And in some cases, by turning those off they fell foul of sort of local guidance. But that was the extent to which we were asking people to reduce down their usage.

Shaun, who you met earlier, was down to some of the major horse racing stables that use a lot of water. I just want to give you, I know those are very specific examples, but I had a team of folks phoning around to those customers asking them to play their part as part of those water use reductions. So, looking at whether they could shift or remove their demand entirely, or shift it to different points of the day for us.

And by and large, we saw a fantastic response over the course of the summer. Our demand was at its highest in over 20 years, and at its peak was around 30%, a third higher than what we would expect at that time of year. We saw that drop off dramatically in response to all of that reach out to businesses alongside our domestic customers.

For those of you that, well you would have all received it, but for those of you that sort of engaged with and saw the communications we were sending regularly throughout the summer both in South Staffs and in Cambridge, we were focusing very much around not just domestic water efficiency but also business efficiency, which we then sent some bespoke messages out to those customers via their retailers, because they don't pay their bill directly to us, we're engaging with those, the retailers that they pay their money to, to receive water efficiency information from us as well. And they're a critical part around our future planning around water resource management.

We did a lot of specific things, but we will continue to engage with that sector regardless of which step within the mechanistic flow that Elena spoke through within the restriction sort of ladder.

CCW Chair: I was going to ask a point about you liaising with the retailers, and for the panel, the retailers are the organisations of building on the household market for their usage, so thank you for raising that point. Community Member 8, happy that the question has been answered or in parts?

Community Member 8: Mostly happy, what I would say is I know we talked about households a lot again and it kind of reminded me of when Andy Burhnam called an emergency COBRA meeting about climate change, and he came up with sending a text to everyone to stop using barbecues. It put a bit of impetus on individuals and also, it was a very small measure. So, I guess we have to be careful about where we put the impetus, so more about the big businesses.

And it's great you guys phoned, and you mentioned specific things, that's great, but how do you measure change? Did they come back and say, "Oh, we did this and this," how do we measure did they do it, did it make a difference? And also, what powers do you have, I think you mentioned a certain order of hierarchy, an order in what you can do things in, but what powers do you have to more enforce that, do we need more government policies in to help you get that support from businesses and industries? So that's all, sorry, very fast.

CCW Chair: No, thank you, it's a really valid point, after what, a very difficult summer, right? Just very quickly, because I am conscious of time, anyone in the wider community, have you got a follow-up question, or are you happy with the response that you've heard this evening?

Happy? Great, okay, well excellent, thank you all so much. Thank you, Elena and Alex, and to Shaun in the background, all of the actions that you've seen on the screen now would have been

captured by the team sitting behind us, supporting Clare and I on the call this evening. They will form the basis of South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water's follow-up action plan.

I'll do a quick summary of the next steps. A summary report, a fully anonymised transcript and a list of actions will be published within seven working days, that's by Thursday 29th October. Before publication, session members will have the opportunity as will the water company to request changes or redactions of personal info, as necessary.

South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water and Elena and the team will publish their action plan in 28 days' time, which is Friday 27th November, a date for the diary, setting out how it will deliver against these agreed actions. CC Water will then publish that plan on its website, and once that action plan is published, all community members will be sent a link and a short survey, asking whether the plan accurately reflects what was agreed and whether it is enough to address the concerns raised. Then you will all have 10 working days to respond.

CC Water will then track progress, so that trackability point, Community Member 4, against the action plan through the Water Voice process, or through this process. That's because this process is designed to make sure that tonight's discussion isn't just a nice discussion and an opportunity to interact with customers and with the company, it actually leads to follow through of actions, and I think we've made that point numerous times this evening.

A huge thank you to you all for participating this evening, it's been an absolute pleasure to chair the panel with you all. Thank you to the company for me putting you under time pressure and for you responding and thank you to the panel members for how well you have articulated your questions this evening, how you have shared your thought process and follow-up questions, and so a huge thank you from me. And thank you to everybody behind the scenes as well, for capturing tonight's discussion and for engaging in the process. Because do you know what, your input is what gives these sessions purpose, so thank you very, very much and it's good evening from me.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you from me too.

Alex Wilkes: Thanks everyone.

Elena Karpathakis: Thank you.

[CLOSE]